

THE BROWN CASTLE



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THE BROWN CASTLE

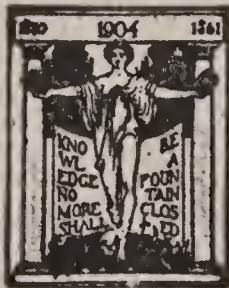


"ONCE UPON A TIME," BEGAN THE PRINCESS.—Page 70.

THE BROWN CASTLE

BY
REBECCA RICE

ILLUSTRATED BY
W. F. STECHER



BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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THE BROWN CASTLE

CHAPTER ONE

THE CASTLE

GRANDMOTHER BROWN lifted her head from the red calico cushion in her easy-chair and looked at the clock for perhaps the twentieth time. It was just four o'clock. Time does go so slowly when one wants something done and there is no one about to do it. However, Betty would soon be there and she would attend to everything.

There was a great deal to do. Although spring was really on the way, as the few blades of grass and the lilac-branch with its swelling buds proved, it still was very cold. Grandmother was

wrapped up in a worn shawl, but she shivered. Betty would put coal on the fire.

There were other tasks as well. The dinner dishes had not been washed and the place was mussy and untidy. Grandmother Brown sighed. She wished that she could stir about and do things, but that was impossible. The burden of housework and school was too much for Betty, who was only nine.

Again her eyes strayed to the clock. Five minutes past! Betty was probably on her way home now. She would have something interesting to tell. Perhaps there would be a new story or song that she had learned in school. A step in the hall, a laughing voice, and the door opened. Betty had come.

She paused a moment at the door for a final word to her companion, Myrtle O'Toole. "It won't take a half an hour. If you get your work done first, call for me, and I will come for you if I beat."

A very pardonable look of pride crossed Grandmother's face as Betty entered. From the crown of her curly golden-brown hair to the soles of her rather shabby footwear she was the finest-looking child in the whole block in the opinion of her relative.

She welcomed her small granddaughter with a smile, eager as a child to hear about school affairs. She was interested in the new poem, the gold-fish that had just been given to the fourth-grade room, and about the lessons. Betty joyfully related all the news that she could think of as she washed the dishes and set the room to rights. As a final thrill, she drew forth an arithmetic paper marked with an imposing 100 and a red star.

"It is the fourth red star I have had this term," she explained. "When I get another one, my name goes up on the board with a gold star after it."

"That will be very nice," responded

Grandmother. "Your father always was a smart little boy."

Betty shook her head. "I'm not smart," she replied sadly. "I just hate arithmetic. I made a dreadful mistake on the last example to-day, but just as Mary was picking up the papers I saw that I had put down an eight instead of a nine. I had just barely time to fix it. Wasn't it lucky I found it?"

Afterwards she told about the new playhouse that she and Myrtle had started in the lilac-bushes at the Castle.

"Where?" asked Grandmother almost sharply.

"We call the big brown house on the corner the Castle," explained Betty. "It is so big and beautiful and has a lovely yard. It is the only house on the whole street that has a yard."

"Is it still vacant?" asked Grandmother Brown excitedly. "Tell me, Betty, is it empty?"

Betty nodded. "It has been empty for

years, Grandmother. That is why all the children are going there to play. If it wasn't for the Brown Castle we should all have to play in the street, and that would be horrid."

Grandmother shook her head. "For fifteen years," she murmured, "for fifteen years and more, the old house has been empty. Hate closed its doors, and hate has kept them locked these many years."

Betty drew closer. She had always felt that some mystery was connected with the big boarded-up house. Perhaps Grandmother could clear it up. "Tell me about it," she begged.

Grandmother shook her head. There was a hard look upon her face and her lips were closed in a tight line. Betty was worried.

"You do not care whether I play there, do you, Grandmother?" she said wistfully.

"No, child, no," responded the old lady. "Indeed who has a better right?" she mut-

tered to herself, but Betty did not heed her. Myrtle was at the door and Betty's tasks were done.

Now Myrtle was Betty's best friend, and a very good friend she was. Myrtle never did anything by halves. She either loved or hated, and was most thorough in either emotion. Her friendship for Betty dated back three years when Betty first came to the city to live.

Betty had come from the country and was all unused to the bustle of city life. The heavy trucks, electric cars, and automobiles were a source of menace when she wanted to cross the street. She had held closely to her mother's hand that first terrible journey from the dingy, crowded apartment-house to the school.

She had hated the noise and confusion of that first day. With real fear had she gazed at the howling mob of shrieking boys and girls at play in the big school-yard. It was a dreadful moment when her

mother, after consigning her to the care of the busy second-grade teacher, had gone away and left her.

It had been a dreadful day. She had missed in her spelling-lesson and had been so nervous in the reading-class that she had burst into tears. The other pupils had made fun of her. It was worse on the way home, for she became the center of a small mob of jeering boys.

“Mamma’s baby!” called one.

“Ho, if I couldn’t spell ‘dishes’!” mocked another.

“Baby, cry-baby!” yelled another.

Then one of them had run against her so violently that he tipped her over into the gutter. It was then that Reddy O’Toole had arrived on the scene, a small but valiant combination of red hair, hot temper, and muscle. What he did not do to the big Allen boy was not worth mentioning. Betty had been very grateful.

Myrtle had been with Reddy. Warm-

hearted and impulsive, she had put a friendly arm about Betty and together they had gone home. That afternoon she had called for her.

Several days later Betty had been told to stay after school. Her new teacher had wanted to see how much she had learned in the one-room country school. Betty did not realize that. She thought staying after school was the biggest disgrace and punishment that could be given to a boy or girl. Besides, there would be the walk home alone.

It was not quite so bad as she had feared. The teacher was kind, even friendly. Betty lost some of her fear. Upon coming out of the school door twenty minutes later, whom should she find waiting for her but Myrtle? This indeed was a friend worth having. No wonder Betty loved Myrtle O'Toole. The friendship had only grown deeper and stronger with the years.

Arm in arm they walked down the street

to the Brown Castle. It was the favorite playground of nearly all the children in the neighborhood. The doors and windows had been barred so many years that the possibility of their ever being opened was not considered at all.

For many years the old house had stood there empty. It had been beautiful in the days of long ago. A famous architect of a bygone century had planned its spacious rooms and wide halls. An equally famous landscape-gardener had arranged the beds of flowers and had set out the lilac-bushes. Then the old house was loved and cared for. Pride was taken in its fine grassy lawns.

Now the grass was trampled upon. Well-defined bare spots marked out the site of a baseball diamond in the back yard. Small pockets in the front lawn loudly proclaimed marbles to all interested in that pleasing form of amusement. Bits of broken crockery and glass in careful ar-

rangement down by the lilac-bushes showed where the playhouse was.

There were many stories told of the old house. People could not understand why it was that a house completely furnished should be left vacant so long. Why had not the owner sold it, if he had not cared to make it his home? Some said that it was a haunted house, a house haunted by the ghost of a beautiful woman. Others said that it was infested with rats and mice that had driven away the last people who had tried to live there. One thing they all agreed upon. There was some strange story connected with it. It seemed queer that the owner had not sold the property to make way for a block of stores or an apartment-house.

As Betty and Myrtle neared the Castle, Reddy O'Toole came running to meet them, followed by the rest of the gang. The girls could see that something had happened to excite them.

"What do you suppose has happened?" gasped Reddy with what breath he had left after the race.

"Tell us," demanded Myrtle.

"Where were you going?" he replied.

"To the Castle to play," she answered.

"What has that to do with it?"

"You'll never go there again to play," put in Spud. "None of us will. They won't let us. Somebody is moving in this very minute."

"They'll be moving out a lot quicker," growled Reddy. "The gang is going to get after them Saturday. We won't have folks spoiling the only baseball diamond anywhere around here. We'll fix them."

"You bet," replied Spud. "Come on, Red, we've got to let the rest of the gang know."

Myrtle and Betty walked sadly past the Castle several times. The boys had spoken truly. There were many signs of activity about the old place. Apparently

the newcomers were turning the old house inside out. Ancient tables, chairs, beds, and bureaus were piled up in the yard. Carpets were being beaten by a whistling workman clad in blue overalls. A portly colored woman was polishing windows until they shone as the sun hit their surface.

For the first time in many years, smoke rose from the chimney. The shutters were all down. The whole house looked as if it had just awakened from a long nap. The yard, however, was deserted by the children. Not a child hopped on the hopscotch spot or tossed jacks on the cracked cement walk.

"I'll bet there will be two old maids that will take turns sitting at the window. The minute that they see one of us in the yard they will come out and chase us with a broomstick," said Myrtle a trifle spitefully.

Betty laughed. The idea of two old ladies chasing the lively Reddy amused

her, although she was not in the laughing mood.

"Perhaps there will be a little girl or boy move in," she replied hopefully.

The next afternoon they walked by the house again. And talked about the new people. Neither had seen them. Finally Myrtle's curiosity could bear it no longer.

"I am going right up and see," she asserted.

"Mercy!" gasped Betty. "I'd never dare."

"You can wait for me by the gate," replied Myrtle, as with an impudent swing to her shoulders she started up the weed-bordered path toward the house. According to Mrs. Smith who lived in the same block, there wasn't much that would frighten Myrtle O'Toole, but upon reaching the front door she hesitated. In spite of her bravado her heart beat more rapidly as she waited and listened. Then she rang the bell.

As its tinkle died away, she heard some one coming through the hall and it took all her courage to stand and wait. The door was flung open and a vision of beauty stood before her astonished eyes. The vision was a very pretty young lady who smiled in a very friendly way. Her hair was golden and her eyes were blue. She looked like the picture of a princess that Myrtle had seen in a fairy-tale book. The princess who owned the Brown Castle! Why, it was like a story.

Respect and admiration took the place of impudence. Surely one so pretty and sweet could not be cruel. Then more wonder crept into her face, for in the arms of the lovely lady was a doll as big as a really, truly baby. It was such a doll as Myrtle had never seen outside a shop window. Myrtle just longed to take it into her arms.

“I am so glad to have a caller so soon,” said the Princess pleasantly. “I was just

wishing I had some one to take care of Isobel for me."

It was nice of the Princess to know that she had come to call. She hardly would have known what to say if she had been asked why she had come. The Princess seemed to know without having to be told. It was delightful to be treated in such a grown-up way. Myrtle decided that she was going to like the Princess very much indeed.

"Is Isobel a little girl?" she asked as she stepped over the threshold into the house of mystery.

"No," smiled the Princess. "She is a baby, a doll baby, but I feel as if she wanted me to take care of her all the time and with this big house to settle, I feel as if I hadn't the time."

Myrtle laughed. Then a sudden recollection of Betty patiently waiting by the gate came to her mind.

"I'd love to," she answered, "but there is

Betty waiting for me at the gate. You haven't got enough work for two little girls, have you?" she went on wistfully.

"There is a big box of books in the middle of the sitting-room floor that is dreadfully in my way," replied the Princess. "Perhaps you and Betty would like to unpack them for me. The bookcase is all put up ready for them."

"Oh I just love books!" cried Myrtle happily. "May I go after Betty?"

"Run and get Betty, by all means," laughed the Princess.

That young lady was delighted, although just a little afraid of entering the house infested with rats and ghosts and which hate had closed years ago. One look, however, at the smiling face of Myrtle's Princess drove away her fears and soon both little girls were on their knees beside a huge wooden box, gazing with fascinated eyes at the process of opening.

It was a most gifted Princess who could

pry off the cover of such a big box so easily. Imagine owning enough books to fill such a huge box, anyway! The little girls watched with breathless interest when the Princess lifted the paper which covered the books. When at last it was lifted, disclosing piles of the most fascinating books, a little cry of admiration broke from their lips. Was there ever another Princess who read "Little Prudy," "Alice in Wonderland," or "The Wizard of Oz"? The box was filled to the brim with children's books. Myrtle and Betty both had library cards and had read many books. Some of the ones in the box were old friends, but there were many new ones.

"See, Betty," whispered Myrtle, "all the Pepper Books are here. I have read only one of them."

"And here is 'The Princess and the Goblin,'" answered her friend. "I've tried and tried to get it at the Library, but it is always out."

It was a very happy hour spent with the books, and how the time did slip away! It was such a temptation to sit right down and read. Myrtle did get absorbed in the delights of the "Blue Fairy Book" and even conscientious Betty forgot her duty when she discovered a sequel to her favorite "Princess Book." The Princess looked into the room and smiled to see the two heads bending over the books that she herself had loved so dearly when she was a little girl.

At half-past five, the Princess returned followed by a portly colored woman bearing in her arms a tray. On the tray was a blue plate heaped with crisp ginger-cookies and a pitcher filled with cocoa. There were also two of the prettiest cups that the children had ever seen. Betty's was the shape of a rose. The saucer was a green leaf. Myrtle's was a yellow daffodil. Both girls gave a little cry of admiration.

"There is a story about the flower cups," said the Princess. "They were brought from a far-away country as a present to the two little girls who lived in this house long ago."

It was nearly dark before the children left the brown house. The factory whistle, the usual signal for the children in the neighborhood to return to their respective homes, had long since blown, but still they lingered. What mattered a scolding if they could prolong the beautiful time they were having? Few such good times entered their lives, and the moments were too precious to lose a single one. In fact the Princess had gently to suggest their departure.

She stood a moment in the doorway gazing out into the deepening dusk. Then she turned back into the house. Aunt Sally was drawing the curtains. The lamplight cast a cheerful glow on the old-fashioned furniture. The Princess

dropped wearily into a well-worn rocker. She was tired, very tired, but she was well content. She had made a fairly good start in securing the friendship and good will of the little girls. The boys would be more difficult. However, she was confident that her experiment would be a success.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STRATEGY

UPON arriving at the street the little girls seemed to forget that there was any reason for haste and went more slowly. It was dusk, and the lights were beginning to appear in the windows of the houses along the street. There was much they wanted to say before they separated for the night.

“Did you ever see such story-books in all your life?” asked Betty. “All the ones that we like best and a whole heap that we never saw before! They were all for little girls, too.”

“Do you know,” replied Myrtle, “I think perhaps she read them when she was a little girl?”

“I think that there were other books that

we didn't see," went on Betty thoughtfully. "There were other big boxes just like the one we unpacked in the hall."

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised," answered Myrtle. "Those we saw didn't much more than fill up one shelf of that big bookcase."

It had been a wonderful afternoon that they had spent, quite unlike anything else they had ever experienced. Myrtle gave a little skip of pleasure.

"Let's not tell any one about it," she whispered. "It seems like a fairy tale to me. She is the enchanted Princess who lives in the magic castle."

"Yes, the fairy Princess of the Land of Heart's Delight," replied Betty softly. "Mother used to tell me a story of it before she went away. It was a lovely story."

Tears came into her eyes, as they always did when she thought of the dear mother

who had gone away never to come back, and Myrtle put a sympathetic arm about her shoulders. It would be sad, thought Myrtle, to have no mother and no brothers or sisters. It would be horrid to sleep and cook, sit and eat, all in one room. Sometimes there was hardly enough to eat at Betty's house, and very often the good-hearted Mrs. O'Toole put up extra in the way of school lunches for Myrtle to share.

"Let's keep it a secret," cautioned Myrtle, as they climbed the last steps.

"Yes," agreed Betty.

At the door they separated, Betty tiptoeing softly into the room at the left of the corridor while Myrtle skipped blithely a little way farther and entered a door at the right.

She paused at the threshold. Two of the Brigham boys and Reddy O'Toole, her brother, were seated cross-legged on the floor. Their heads were together in a way

painfully suggestive of mischief. Her mother was in the next room with the baby. Reddy was talking.

“There’s no two ways about it, fellers, we’ve just got to drive them out.”

“ ’Twon’t be hard,” put in Jimmy. “There’s nothing but that girl and the colored woman. Women are always skeered at things. We’ll get them out fast enough.”

“Just wait till the gang gets busy tomorrow morning,” boasted Tommy.

“Don’t forget, fellers, at five o’clock in the morning,” cautioned Reddy.

That was all Myrtle heard, for her mother called her to wash up the next-to-littlest baby before supper. But it was enough. She well knew their powers of perseverance. To stop them was out of the question. Somehow she must warn the Princess of the enemies’ plan. It was like a fairy tale after all.

How was she to do it? Even if she

should wake up before five o'clock, the Princess would probably be asleep. No, she must warn her that very night, but how? Mother would never allow her to go out after supper, at least until the last baby was undressed, put to bed, and asleep. That would be too late. However, there was Betty.

Betty's grandmother was old and deaf. Betty could do just about what she pleased. The only obstacle was Betty's timidity. She was afraid to go out all by herself. Perhaps her love for the Princess would help her out. Something must be done!

"Mother," she said, "I want to go over and speak to Betty a minute."

"Indeed you sha'n't go out of this place to-night. The idea of you traipsing all over the place when I need your help. Go and feed Sammy, and don't let me hear of your going out again to-night."

"But, Mother, please let me; it is important."

“Not another word from you, young lady. Look there now. Just because you were not careful, Sammy has spilled over Jenny’s soup,” was the angry retort.

After mopping up the spilled soup, Myrtle returned to her work with desperation in her heart. Reddy was repairing an old sling-shot. Battle was in his eyes. It seemed as if the Princess’s windows were doomed.

A yellow pad of paper and a pencil lay on the table. They belonged to Frances, the oldest O’Toole. She was in high school and usually her property was considered sacred, but necessity knows no bounds. Silently as a cat, Myrtle secured one sheet of the paper, also the pencil. These she consigned to the depths of her pocket.

But how should she get it to Betty as long as she could not take it herself? Reddy was the only answer to her question, but would he come to her assistance

against his own cause? A sudden inspiration came to her.

Hastily she ran into the front room. Her mother in the kitchen was bending over the stove. The other members of the family were eating. On her paper she scrawled her message. Surely no brother, even one so clever as Reddy could read a meaning into that message. With satisfaction she folded it and slipped it back into her pocket.

Luck was with her. Two ginger-cookies, remnants of the feast, were also in her pocket. It was comical to pay Reddy with cookies from the Princess to carry a message warning her of his own plans. In spite of her anxiety, Myrtle giggled at the thought of it.

"Hey, Reddy," she began as she rejoined the family. "Will you do something for me?"

"Depends on what it is!" was the curt reply.

“’Tisn’t much,” she answered. “Just run over and give this to Betty, will you?”

“What is it?” he asked.

“Just a joke. You can read it if you want to,” she replied carelessly.

Reddy opened the note and read aloud with good-natured brotherly scorn:

“The Fairy Princess is in danger. Even now soldiers are on their way to capture the palace. Warn her of the danger without fail. I would if I could, but I can’t.”

Reddy looked at his sister in disgust. “Of all the stuff!” he ejaculated.

“I told you it was a joke. Please take it,” begged Myrtle.

He stuffed it into his pocket and pulled out his hat.

“What’ll you give me if I do?” he teased.

Myrtle held up one of the ginger-cookies in a tantalizing fashion. The other she held behind her until the proper time to display it.

"I'll give you this if you take it, and this if you bring back an answer," she said.

"Agreed," answered Reddy, "though of all the silliness, it takes a girl every time."

Five minutes later he was back to claim the other half of his reward. In his hand was a note elaborately folded and sealed with a crooked safety-pin. Myrtle opened it eagerly, and read:

"DEAR MYRTLE:

"I am awfully afraid of facing the giants, witches, and soldiers, but it would never do to let the wicked things hurt the Princess. I'll send my humming-bird messenger right away.

"BETTY.

"P. S. What do you suppose she'll do about it?"

It was half-past eight when a little figure stole down the steps of the dingy apartment-block. How dark it was! Only the street lamps cast faint circles of

light which seemed to make the surrounding darkness more gloomy and terrifying. Shadows, horribly suggestive of the pictures of evil spirits, seemed to lurk in the doorways. Every now and then a truck or an electric car would rumble by, sounding ever so much louder than in the daytime.

It was not a long walk to the brown house. It seemed to the timid Betty, however, that each minute was an hour. A big dog barked with terrifying ferocity as she passed the market. At the crossing stood a burly policeman. Betty had never been taught that the policeman was one of her best friends. She was very much afraid of him.

In her haste to pass this 'danger, she did not notice the big truck bearing down upon her. There was a grinding of brakes, a frightened cry from the driver and a quick swoop on the part of the policeman. He was just in time to snatch

the bewildered child from the danger that threatened her.

"Well, well," he said, and to Betty's ears his voice was kinder than she imagined a policeman's could be. "What's all this? Were you trying to get run over, my dear?"

"Oh, no, sir," was the stammering answer, "I was going over there," and she pointed to the house across the way.

"All right, sister," he said as he took her hand in his big one. "I'll just see that you get there in safety."

At the gate he left her. Betty gave a little sigh of relief. She was safely there in spite of the perils she had passed through, and soon everything would be all right. She pulled at the jangling bell and then waited for the door to open.

"Fo' de lan's sake, chile, whatever brought you out at dis time of night?" exclaimed Aunt Sally staring in amazement at the woe-begone little figure.

Betty stumbled over the threshold and clasped the friendly dark hand in both of her own small ones.

“Oh, please, may I speak with the Princess?” she asked.

Aunt Sally looked at her as if she did not understand the request.

“De Princess?” she repeated. “Sholy chile, we ain’t got no Princess here.”

Betty gasped. No Princess! All that dark trip for nothing! Surely there had been a Princess there that afternoon. Tears rolled down her cheeks and sobs shook her from head to foot.

“For massy sakes!” exclaimed Aunt Sally gathering her into her ample embrace. “You jest come in and tell Miss Virginia all about it.”

In a very few minutes Betty was in her Princess’s arms pouring out the story of the Danger.

“You see they are afraid that you won’t let them play ball any more or slide or any-

thing," she explained. "They are not awfully bad boys except when something terrible happens, and you don't know how bad they felt when they knew some one was going to live in this house. All the children used to play here, and they don't want to have to go back to playing in the street."

The Princess held her in her arms and rocked back and forth. "Just as mother used to," thought Betty. It would be terrible to have this lovely lady driven away. She lifted her head anxiously.

"Reddy has been real nice to me," she said. "He fought with a boy and licked him for teasing me. Are you going to tell the policeman?" she whispered.

The Princess laughed.

"What do boys like best of all, Betty?" she asked mischievously.

Betty again raised her head and considered with it a little to one side. Then she smiled.

“Doughnuts,” she said, “and cake, and pie. Oh, they like things to eat.”

Aunt Sally chuckled.

“I’ve got an idea. You jes’ leave it to me, Miss Virginia,” she said. “I ain’t raised six children and five of them boys for nothing. I’ll jes’ settle the young rascals good and proper, but I’ll do it in a way that will make them your friends for life.”

The Princess smiled down into Betty’s face.

“You see, honey, things are going to be all right. Aunt Sally always knows just what to do, so you need not worry any longer.”

It was nine o’clock. To Betty’s delight, a little bird popped out of a little door high up in the clock and with a violent flapping of its wings cuckooed nine times. Seeing the lateness of the hour, the Princess rose hastily.

“Won’t your mother worry about you?” she asked.

Betty shook her head in denial.

"There is only Grandma at home," she explained, "and she goes to bed right after supper, 'cause she is very old."

Then she told about the beautiful mother that had become so sick that she was taken away in a big black automobile to the hospital and never came home again. She told about the feeble little grandmother who was too old to take care of herself, even. The little story was simply told, but it filled the tender eyes of the Princess with tears. One dropped down upon Betty's head. Aunt Sally openly wiped tears from her own eyes on the corner of her apron.

Betty looked at them with amazement. She knew that she was sad because of her loss, but to have the Princess in tears! Why, the Princess must love her a little bit, if her story made her feel so bad! Betty threw loving arms about the Princess. From then on she was the best-beloved ob-

ject in Betty's world. Surely no other face was so sweet, except Mother's.

Then Aunt Sally brought in a glass of milk and more of the crisp ginger-cookies. After this repast, she was so sleepy that she hardly knew when Aunt Sally wrapped her up and took her back home.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONQUEST OF THE GANG

THE burr of their father's alarm clock woke both Myrtle and Reddy at five o'clock. As silently as a cat, Reddy slipped out of bed and began to draw on his trousers. It does not take an active boy long to dress. Reddy would have considered himself sadly abused if his mother had called him at such an early hour. He had been known to take a good half-hour to dress when some unpleasant errand was expected of him. However, there was no time wasted on this particular morning. He was all eagerness to be up and off before his father was dressed. Such little details as washing himself and brushing his hair were completely overlooked.

As soon as Reddy had tiptoed out of the house, cautiously holding his shoes in his hand, Myrtle herself was up and doing. Suppose Betty had failed? Suppose she had been afraid to go out into the dark streets alone? Myrtle well knew her friend's timidity.

In spite of her own fears, Myrtle made up her mind to see the actions of the gang and to stop them if possible, even though it might bring their wrath upon her unlucky head.

It did not take her much longer to dress than her brother, although she did take the time to smooth out her tangled black hair and to tie it back out of her eyes with a red ribbon. To wash, she did not dare, for the kitchen faucet made such a racket.

She was farther delayed by her father's leisurely activities in the next room. It would be fatal to the success of her trip for her father to know of her desire to leave the house so early in the morning.

He would instantly fear that she was in mischief, and would forbid her going out.

The street seemed strangely silent when she reached it. A solitary milk-wagon jangled past, driven by a very sleepy-looking boy, but not another soul was in sight. She looked up and down the street, hoping to locate the whereabouts of her brother, but not a sight of his red head rewarded her search. Evidently he was in hiding, waiting for the rest of the gang to make their somewhat tardy approach.

Taking pains to go by the back way, Myrtle gained the Castle without being seen. Smoke was coming from the chimney. They must be very early risers. It made her errand easier, and she was glad.

Quick as a flash she crossed the wide lawn that separated the house from the back street, for in the distance she saw the red head of her brother at the trysting-place, the blackened ruins of a house that

had recently burned to the ground. Aunt Sally had evidently seen her approach, for she flung wide the door and drew the breathless child inside.

“It’s all right, honey,” she said. “Aunt Sally knows all about it and so does Miss Virginia. She’s in the parlor. You jes’ run in and set with her.”

Myrtle crossed the hall and gently pushed open the door. The Princess was more lovely than ever. Her hair was loose, flowing over her shoulders in a most princess-like way. She wore a blue silk wrapper of a wonderful shade. As Myrtle pushed open the door, she smiled a welcome and held out her hand.

“Come over here with me, my dear, and we will watch the fun,” she said.

Myrtle skipped across the room and was soon curled up on the old sofa beside her Princess. Both looked out of the window.

An old picket fence, rather dilapidated,

it is true, ran around the whole property. Huge wooden gate-posts of a style rather ancient now were on either side of the front walk. The gate itself rested in the dump in the back of the barn.

On top of one of the gate-posts was an object that made Myrtle open her eyes wide with surprise, for it was the last thing one expects to find on the front post. A big, shiny, new dish-pan rested there. In it were brown things, but what they were Myrtle could not make out.

A small stick bearing a sheet of note-paper was stuck up like a little flag inside the pan. Myrtle gazed with questioning eyes at the Princess.

“What is it?” asked the child.

“Wait and see what happens,” replied the Princess.

At this moment Aunt Sally bustled into the room chuckling.

“Dey’s headed dis way, Miss Virginia, with the red-headedest little boy I ever see

in the lead. I think dat dey see de dish-pan, for dey's headin' toward de front of de house."

The Princess dropped the lace curtain in front of them so that they could see everything that went on without being seen by the boys. Myrtle waited with interest and fear.

It was interesting to watch the boys approach, for they were so very cautious about it. Only now and then did the glimpse of the brilliant head of Reddy O'Toole betray their whereabouts. Myrtle knew that sling-shots were close at hand and that each boy had a pocketful of ammunition. Why, oh, why had not the Princess closed the blinds of the palace? She was not even nervous. Myrtle could not understand it.

Meanwhile Reddy and his gang drew nearer. They were almost at the front gate now. Myrtle could see that Reddy was taking careful aim with the sling-shot.

Evidently he was going to knock the pan from the gate-post. Just as he was about to let go, his chum knocked the stone from the sling.

"Wait a minute, you idiot," he said, "I want to see what it is out here for."

He seized the paper on the stick and read it to himself hastily.

"Lookit, fellers," he cried exultantly, "just lookit!"

He waved the paper over his head and gave a small whoop of delight as he read aloud:

"Help yourselves, boys, and come back at half-past ten to earn some more."

"What do you know about that?" exclaimed Tubby, diving into the pan with both hands.

"M-m-m-m, doughnuts! Ain't they swell?" mumbled another, his mouth full of the dainty comestible.

“Will we come back at ten-thirty? I’ll say we will,” said another.

Only Reddy was silent. Only Reddy’s face wore a frown, and seeing it, his sister’s face clouded. She knew very well what Reddy’s fits of anger were like, for she had experimented with his quick temper.

“It’s a frame-up,” he sputtered. “Some one’s squealed on us and I’m going to find out who it is. I’ll fix ’em. Come on, fellers, you ain’t going back on me, are you?”

“It’s doughnuts,” said Joe.

“With sugar sprinkled on,” added Tubby.

“Where’s your common sense, Red?” put in Spud. “Even if they did get wind of our plans, it seems to me they acted pretty decent about it. Why, they might have warned the cop, and then we would have been in hot water for fair.”

“I’ll bet that folks that would give doughnuts to boys would let them play

baseball in the back yard," added Joe.

"All right, fellers, hang about them if you want to. I ain't a-going to. That's flat, and if you do, it'll bust up our gang as far as I am fixed. You can have either me or these folks," cried Reddy facing them with angry eyes.

"You're dead wrong, Red," said Spud.

An angry, sore-hearted boy walked away from the brown house with vengeance and sorrow in his heart, for the gang was very dear to him. He was an outcast.

Shame and sorrow were in Myrtle's eyes as she faced her Princess, for Reddy was in disgrace. He was her brother and had done something that was sure to make the Princess unhappy. How would the Princess feel towards her? Would she ever forgive Reddy? Myrtle knew that she would be unhappy unless he was forgiven, for she loved her brother dearly.

"Don't worry, dear," said the Princess.

“He will be sorry by and by, and I am almost sure we will win him yet.”

Myrtle smiled, but it was a long time, judging by a child's standard, before Reddy O'Toole joined the Princess's court of admirers.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DISCOVERY

AT ten o'clock Virginia went out and began to rake the lawn. It was hard work, for the dried grass was long and matted. Little green shoots were coming up and the buds were swelling on the lilac-bushes along the fence. Just being alive was a pleasure.

As she worked, her thoughts ran ahead, and in her mind she could see where now was desolation and dried grass, in a few months could be a garden of rare, beautiful blossoms. It was not a garden of flowers she was thinking of, but a garden of children, children many of her acquaintances and aristocratic friends might consider weeds, but who she was sure had big possibilities.

At this point in her thoughts she became aware of a small boy leaning over the fence, but by no gesture or look did she let him know that she knew he was there. Robert Stanford was there for duty fully fifteen minutes before the time specified. Virginia continued her raking with undiminished ardor, whistling softly a rollicking little tune. To all intents and purposes, Spud might have been in China for all she knew or cared.

He leaned over the fence and frankly stared. This was a different kind of girl from any he was acquainted with. Besides, he had very nearly done this unusually attractive young person a wrong, and he was rather ashamed. Not that he would have admitted it for worlds, but he silently made up his mind that he would show that he was sorry by helping to the best of his ability. Still Virginia raked, raked as though her life depended upon it.

“Say,” he remarked after a moment’s pause, “those doughnuts were swell.”

Virginia looked up with a smile, “I’m glad you liked them. Did you come to earn some more? Aunt Sally is frying some this minute.”

Spud grinned and wrinkled up his nose.

“If there is one thing I really like to eat, it’s hot doughnuts,” he replied. “Give me that rake.”

Within the next quarter of an hour, Tubby and Joe were hard at work picking up stones and carting off rubbish. A huge pile of all burnable substance was made in the back yard for what Joe said was to be the biggest bonfire ever seen in these parts.

Myrtle and Betty had also come to the brown house bringing with them Doris and Jeanette. For each the Princess seemed to have some pleasant task. The bars were down and the children flocked

back to their playground, now doubly precious in view of their fear of losing it forever.

It was a busy, happy morning. Outdoors a busy rake pulled together all dried grass and twigs, and the pile of rubbish grew with each new armful of rakings.

A robin hopped cheerfully along in the weed-grown garden, picking for plump, juicy worms. His mate was looking up tenements. She had almost decided upon building in the wistaria vine over the porch, but was waiting to see whether all the stir about the old house meant danger.

In the house, things were doing also. Aunt Sally, having finished the doughnuts, was cleaning the pantry, washing dishes that had long lain idle on the shelves. At her side were Myrtle and Jeanette, listening with wide-open eyes to the tale of how Br'er Coon made off with old Mass' Possum's dinner.

Betty and Doris were in the garret with

the Princess. It was a spooky place, very dark and quite smelly. The Princess threw open the dusty windows and pushed aside the heavy overhanging creepers. It made the place much less gloomy. A garret was a new experience to these children accustomed to city tenements. It was a mysterious place where they might expect to find almost anything. It was a most interesting pastime to clean it, and a dusty one as well, as several sneezes proclaimed, for Doris's use of the broom was more energetic than discreet.

Each little girl had her hair tied up in an old-fashioned dust-cap and each wielded a dust-pan, mop, or broom. The Princess was struggling with an old bureau.

"It's too heavy, Princess," said Betty. "Just wait a minute till I run down and get Spud and Brick. They are awfully strong."

Spud and Brick were proud of their

muscle, and soon had the furniture moved to the Princess's liking. The only accident that occurred was when an old bureau, unused to being handled, tottered and fell, disclosing any amount of old clothes.

The Princess only laughed. What funny old clothes they were! Queer, old, balloon-like sleeves, tight bodices, and flounced skirts of wild and wonderful colors. Some were of silk, old and cracked, others were of wool, and some of gay-colored calico.

"Some of them will be good for dressing up and playing house," said the Princess, "and some we will make into dolls' things." The children fell upon her with hugs and kisses.

"We'll shake them out, and carry them down and lay them across the bed in your room, Princess," said Betty, busily piling up as many as she could carry.

"Don't trip on the stairs," cautioned Doris. "You've got an awful big load."

"I'll be careful," answered Betty.

It took many trips to carry all the old clothing downstairs. The boys carted the pieces of the old bureau out to the shed that joined the barn.

"We can make things of the pieces," said Brick, who was of an inventive turn of mind. The girls with Jeanette and Doris were perched on the foot of the bed watching, while the Princess shook out the old garments.

The woolen ones were hopelessly spoiled, for the moths had riddled them with holes.

"Such a shame. Just look at this one," said Betty holding up a crimson gown trimmed with little bands of silk and red cut-glass buttons.

"We must save those buttons, girls. Perhaps you would like to cut them off for me, Betty. Here are the scissors," suggested the Princess.

"We ought to save the lace on all these

woolen things, for some of it is lovely," put in Doris.

"Let me rip, too," said Myrtle as she watched Betty carefully snipping off red-glass buttons. "I am sure I can 'do it beautifully."

"We will let you take care of that, then, while the other girls may help me downstairs."

"Isn't this fun?" asked Doris, as she carefully ripped some *écru* lace from a brown cashmere dinner gown. "See how fine I am!" she said as she threw the lace over her yellow head. "I'm a bride."

"I would like to know who wore all these old things," said Myrtle thoughtfully. "It's loads of fun to rummage in an old house that has been shut up for years. Even the Princess herself does not know all the secrets of this house."

They snipped away for nearly a quarter of an hour in happiness. The pile of

laces and cast-off woolen pieces grew higher and higher, and the dress pile diminished. Still Betty worked upon the red dress.

“That is the twenty-fourth red button that I have ripped off this dress,” she said finally, “and they are all sewed on strongly with little tiny bits of stitches.”

She gathered them up as she spoke and poured them from one hand to another. Then she turned the garment over to see whether she had missed any. After some search she saw that all were off except a few on one pocket. She put her hand in the pocket, but drew it out again in surprise.

“Girls, there is something in this pocket,” she cried drawing forth a small lace-trimmed handkerchief and a small box. “I wonder what can be in it,” she went on, turning it over and over.

“Let’s look,” suggested Doris.

“Oh, no!” answered Betty, “we must take it to the Princess.”

They trooped down the stairs and into the parlor bubbling over with a sense of mystery and curiosity. Then three workers looked up in surprise. In breathless haste all talking at once they poured out their discovery. The Princess laughed and put her hands to her ears.

“One at a time, I beg of you,” she said.

Betty displayed the box to the interested Princess and explained how she came to have it in her possession.

“Open it,” said the Princess, “and let me see what you have found.”

With eager fingers and sparkling eyes Betty opened the box and lifted some cotton that was under the lid. They all gave an exclamation of surprise and delight, for beneath the cotton was a string of quaint and curiously cut beads, seemingly made of red garnet and set between links of dull



THEY TROOPED DOWN THE STAIRS AND INTO THE PARLOR.

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gold. The Princess lifted it from its resting-place. The light sparkled on the stones. It was perfect except for one detail. There were supposed to be two pendants held together by links of gold upon which was suspended a larger pendant. The middle pendant, the most exquisite of all, was missing.

"It looks as if there was a story about it," whispered Doris, bending over it for a more careful look.

"I think there is," said the Princess, "or at least it is the part of another story. I shall be able to tell it to you this afternoon, but now I am sure that the boys are on the point of starvation, so we will ask Aunt Sally for the doughnuts."

"Didn't we say it was like a fairy tale?" whispered Betty to Doris. "I should not be a bit surprised to see a prince come riding by, or a bag of gold hidden on the place. Perhaps the chain is an enchanted

necklace of truth, or something like that.”

“It’s wonderful,” replied her friend softly.

“The nicest part about it,” answered Betty, “is that it seems as if it was for us.”

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LOST PRINCESS

EVEN before the Princess had finished her dinner, the children had begun to gather on her front piazza. She would have gone out to them if Aunt Sally had not put her foot down firmly.

“Them children will have to give you a breathing spell,” she asserted. “What would your grandfather say to me, I’d like to know, if I let you get all tuckered out! You were up before five o’clock this morning, and you ought to be lying down this minute.”

Lying down was the last thing that the Princess had thought of doing, but ever since she had been a little girl she had been

in the habit of taking her old nurse's advice. Leaving Aunt Sally to explain to the children that she would not be out until later, she went upstairs to lie on the bed where her mother used to sleep many years before. Although she herself had never seen the old house, it seemed like home.

It was a warm day of early spring, so coats and hats had been discarded. It was quiet and peaceful on the piazza. The little girls rocked in the new green-and-white hammock and talked softly so as not to annoy the Princess. Spud and Tubby bent over a mouse-trap that they were trying to make out of a cigar-box.

The robin, having finally decided to risk the stir about the old house and to build his nest in the rose-vine that straggled up the piazza posts, was industriously picking up bits of string and ravelings from a carpet considered too old to bring back into the house. Mr. Robin

was busy getting his innings before the junk man came.

Simpson's cat, a long-legged yellow one, with a scratch running the whole length of his nose, saw him and, flattening down on his stomach, began to creep closer. Mrs. Robin from her point of vantage in the rose-vine chirped a warning but her mate did not heed her. A well-directed ball thrown by Spud frightened Mr. Robin and made the cat change his mind.

Mr. Robin joined Mrs. Robin in the vine and was lectured for his carelessness.

The Princess arrived just in time to see the cat go over the fence. Spud reclaimed his ball. Mrs. Robin was sputtering in the rose-vine and Mr. Robin was trying to explain. At least so it seemed to the children.

"The robins always used to build their nests in the vine," said the Princess, "and there used to be swallows and pigeons in the barn."

"Did you use to live here?" asked Myrtle with wide-open eyes. "My mother said that some one told her that this house had been closed for twenty years."

"You don't look much older than that," said Spud frankly.

The Princess laughed.

"I see you are going to be interested in my story right away," she teased.

"Is it a true story?" asked Tubby.

"Oh, I hoped it was going to be a fairy tale!" sighed Doris.

"It is a true story, but we will tell it like a fairy tale, so both the girls and the boys will be pleased," compromised the Princess. "See if you can tell the truth from the fiction."

Betty gave a little wriggle of satisfaction, and slipped her arm about the neck of the Princess. It had been nearly a year since any one had told stories to her.

"Once upon a time," began the Princess just as all stories should begin, "there was

a king who lived in a beautiful brown castle surrounded by beautiful gardens of bright flowers. It was a very attractive garden and the two little princesses that belonged to the king loved to play under the clump of lilac-bushes or sail their chip boats in the little pond at the foot of the garden.

“Truly it was a pleasant place, and the king loved it better than any other spot in the world. He loved the broad fields of his neighbors that stretched all about him. He loved the apple-trees which bore shell-like blossoms in the spring, but most of all he loved his little daughters, whom we shall call the first and the second princess.

“Now the first little princess was a great deal older than the second little princess, and, because the lovely queen mother no longer was alive, she tried to be a little mother to her sister, and they loved each other mightily.

“It came to pass that as the years went

by, the first little princess grew up into a young lady princess, and a knight from the sunny South who had come to the castle to visit fell in love with her and married her. She loved him so well that she agreed to go away with him to the far-off Southland, although it was very hard to leave her beloved home, her father, and her dear little sister. But they told her that they could get along very nicely.

“At this time the king was very much disturbed. A puffing, snorting factory had been built very near his land. Of course the men who worked in the factory had large families of little children whom they wanted near them. Some of the king’s neighbors sold their land or built long rows of ugly apartment-houses upon places where once there had been beautiful fields, orchards, and woodlands. And the king was saddened by the change.

“More and more land was sold and more and more factories, tenement-houses, and

stores were built. Most of the king's old friends had sold their land and moved away to a different part of town.

“Many people wanted to buy the king's land. They wanted to tear down the castle and build houses and stores on the king's ground. The little pond where the little princesses had fed their ducks and sailed their boats dried up, for it no longer was fed by the sparkling little brook that used to flow into it. The king's heart was sore, and with anger and bitter words he drove away all who wanted to buy the castle.

“And meanwhile the second little princess was growing up. From a pretty little girl princess she grew into a beautiful young lady princess, and she was sorry for the little children of the poorer people who moved into the crowded houses and had no real place to play. As the king had forbidden their ever entering the garden, the second princess would meet them

by the gate and talk to them. Sometimes she would fill their hands with sweet lilac blossoms and sometimes she would tell them stories of fairies, goblins, and witches.

“The children loved her with all their hearts and sometimes wove pretty stories in which she played the important part. They called her a princess imprisoned behind bars of an impassable fence and guarded by a terrible, white-haired giant. The king did not approve of her entertaining them, but never forbade her doing it.

“There was one man who was especially desirous of buying the land on which the castle stood. It would mean a great deal of money if he could get possession of it. Time and time again he approached the king with proposals to buy the land, but each time the king refused him with greater fury than before.

“Finally as a last hope, he sent his younger brother, thinking that the young

man's pleasant ways and ability might make him successful where his older brother had failed. It seemed as if all his hopes were centered on the king's castle.

"Now the king was in a particularly bad temper that morning. In the first place all the roses from an especially rare bush had been stolen in the night. He had just gotten word that the taxes were going to take a lot more money, and he had a bad headache. It was really not a wise time for any one to ask him to do something he did not want to do, but the young Mr. Brown did not know that.

"The words 'selling land' were to the king like a red rag to a bull. He stamped his foot and drove the young man from his house with bitter words.

"The second princess was in the garden when the young man strode angrily down the path and he saw her there. All the anger in his heart was replaced by admiration, for she was as beautiful as the sun in

his sight. She was dressed in a soft crimson cashmere dress and about her neck she wore a quaint string of curiously cut red beads. Her arms were about one of the poorest and raggedest of all the little children.

“It would make the story too long to tell how he met her, but before another summer came around he came back to the castle to tell the king that he loved the princess and to ask for her hand in marriage. If the king was angry before, he was furious now. He forbade his daughter to speak to the young man. So troubled he was over the whole affair that he began to make plans to take his daughter away, hoping that she would never again see Mr. Brown.

“The princess felt differently, for she loved the young man better than the castle, or the king, or anything else in the whole wide world. She grieved and drooped like a rose that had been cut from its bush.

The king grieved, too, for he loved his girl and honestly thought that he was doing the best thing for her happiness. Finally she could stand it no longer. She left the castle and the king to begin life anew with the man who, to her, was a prince.

“The king couldn’t understand it. He was hurt, but his anger was undiminished, and he did not reply to the loving letter she left for him except to pack up some of her things and send them to her. Among these things were certain clothing, some things that had belonged to her mother, and part of the chain which the princess had broken. The biggest part he could not find to send.

“Weeks and months passed. The castle grew dark and gloomy in his sight. He determined to board up the windows and close its doors forever. The first princess had invited him to come and live with her in the sunny South. The castle was deserted. The king’s hearty step no

longer was heard on the path. No little princess sailed boats on the little pond. The garden became overgrown with weeds. The pond was filled in with rubbish and cinders. The whole place was deserted by those who had once loved it so dearly.

“Years passed. The garden once more became the playground of little children, for the little people of the tenements claimed it for their own. Again the lilac-bushes looked down upon playhouses. Tops were spun on the walk, and childish voices made the old garden rejoice.

“Meanwhile far away in the sunny South, things were happening. A tiny little girl baby came to the first princess, and how the king did love that baby! All the anger in his heart dried up and was gone, for it seemed as if the baby came bringing love in her little hands. The king was sorry that he had been so cruel, and he determined to write a loving letter

to his other daughter, addressing it to the place she had given as her future home. On the back of the letter he put the return address.

“The letter came back unopened. On it was written that Mr. and Mrs. Brown had gone away, leaving no address.

“More years went by with no one hearing a word from the second princess. The little Virginia was a big girl thirteen years old when the first letter came. It was merely the announcement of the birth of little Anne Brown. It was addressed to the first princess, but on no place was the address of the second princess.

“Six years later another letter came from the second princess, but such a ragged one! It looked as though it had gone all over the country and had been nibbled by mice. It was eagerly opened.

“Sad news it contained. Only dire necessity had forced her to write. Her husband was dead and she herself not well.

Her little girl was the delight of her heart, and it was for her sake that she was appealing for help. If anything happened to her, would her sister take her little girl?

“The king wiped tears from his spectacles when he finished the little note. Right away he would go to his daughter and erase the bitterness of the years of separation. Then he looked for the address. It was gone, nibbled off to help make the bed of some baby mice somewhere. Ah, it was bitter. Only a tiny scrap of the address was there. Together they pored over it, trying to get some clue. Only three letters, but they were from a part of the city he had lived in. He determined to go back to his old home and try to find his daughter.

“The king’s granddaughter Virginia was much excited over the idea of having her aunt and little cousin come. It would seem almost like having a little sister. She put the nicest bedroom in order for the

second princess, and arranged her old playroom for the little lost princess, as she called the little cousin. Then they waited.

“Weeks went by. The king had not been able to find his daughter. He had put advertisements in the paper. He had gone to all the hospitals and orphan asylums, but nowhere could he find a trace of the second princess or the little lost Anne. He knew that they were poor, unhappy, and sad. Perhaps his daughter was dead. Perhaps his grandchild was in the hands of careless, unloving people. Wherever they were, they needed him, and yet he could not come to their assistance. It was pitiful.

“He could not bear the sight of his old home. While he was in the city, he stayed in a hotel and never walked by the old house where once he had been so happy.

“After several months of vain search he returned to the South, a broken-hearted man. Somewhere was his little grand-

child, neglected and in poverty. There were many unhappy children in the world. In his search he had seen them. Some were not properly fed. Others had no place to play, or any one to care how they played, or what they did.

“He thought of the children who lived near his old home. He had once driven them from his yard. He was sorry now. His daughter had been sorry for them and had wanted to make them happier. A new idea came to him.

“Virginia was the one to whom he told his plan. They were great chums and had fine times together. He knew that she would be interested and would be the one to carry out the plans. She was still only a girl, but when she grew older would be the time to go back to the old home and make it into a happy playground for the children who had no place but the streets.

“It was a happy plan, and one that

brought much happiness to both the king and Virginia.

“Now Virginia is a grown-up young lady and the time has come for her to do as she and her grandfather had planned. He made her promise that she would go back to the old home and turn it from a gloomy, shut-up pile of stone and wood into the dwelling-place of happiness.

“And I promised that I would,” concluded the Princess looking about the circle of absorbed faces with a gentle smile.

The children drew a long breath.

“Is it really a true story?” asked Myrtle. “Is there really a little lost girl?”

The Princess nodded.

“Little Lost Princess Anne,” murmured Betty. “How I should like to find her!”

“There is a clue!” cried Spud eagerly. “There is that necklace. You have a piece of it and the lost, I mean, the second princess has a piece of it, too. In a detec-

tive story I read once, two long-lost brothers found each other because each had a part of an old watch-chain that belonged to their father. You could write just as good a story about the Lost Princess.”

“We aren’t writing stories,” put in Myrtle, “we are living them.”

“It isn’t a finished story, though,” sighed Betty. “It’s just like a magazine story. Just as you get to the most interesting parts and can hardly wait to see what comes next, it says, ‘Continued in the September number.’ ”

“I wish we could finish it up the way we liked,” remarked Jeanette.

“It would be Christmas,” went on Betty, “and there would be snow all over the ground. The Princess would be decorating a beautiful tree for the little children. The window would have no curtains, so people going by could look in and see how cheerful and pretty it was inside. Little Princess Anne would be passing by in the

storm outside. She might have been going on an errand for the horrid old woman that she lived with, or better yet, she might be going for something for her poor sick mother.

“When she reached the palace, she would look in and wish that she had a nice home and money and things. Perhaps she would creep up to the window to look in and the Princess would see her little white face and bring her in.”

“Yes,” interrupted Myrtle, “and Anne would be wearing the pendant, because that had been the only thing in the house that was nice, so her mother had given it to her for a Christmas present that very morning. Go on and finish the story, Betty.”

“Well,” went on Betty willingly enough, “the Princess would recognize the pendant at once. She would take Anne into her arms and together they would go and get the second princess.

After that they'd live happily ever after and go on making this place a happy one for all the children."

The Princess smiled down at Betty.

"It is a pity we can't finish our life stories as happily and as prettily as you have finished the story of the Princess Anne," she said softly.

CHAPTER SIX

MARJORIE

OF course the parents were vastly interested in the new developments at the once closed Castle. At first some were rather suspicious of the Princess. They wanted no charity or condescension. However, as time went by and the gifts of the Princess confined themselves to entertainment and such food as any mother might hand out at the back door to a hungry crowd, they began to be less suspicious.

By and by they began to call at the big house. Mrs. O'Toole was the first to come. Hers was not a social call; the main reason of her leaving her Monday's wash was to locate the two most troublesome of her flock, Sammy and Jenny.

Sammy and Jenny O'Toole were geniuses in the way of mischief. What did not originate in the fertile brain of one, did in the other. They were pretty children with an abundant supply of freckles, wide grins, and eyes of such innocence that it was hard to reconcile them with the deeds they did.

Since they were able to walk, the direction of their new accomplishment had been away from home. After school hours, Myrtle, with the able assistance of Betty, usually kept track of them, but while the girls were busy at school the whereabouts of the truants was a cause for much concern.

The twins were only a part of Mrs. O'Toole's responsibility. There were dishes to wash and clothes both to make and to mend. It was therefore with some reluctance that she left her clothes soaking that busy Monday morning to look for her lively offspring.

Her search was not a long one. The joyful shout of Sammy led her to the Brown Castle. At the gate she stopped to enjoy the pretty tableau. The Princess was on her knees spading the earth about her rose-bushes. Jenny was on the grass beside her cuddling a rag doll that looked as if it had seen years of service. Sammy was busily picking angle-worms from the newly-turned earth and putting them into an empty lard-pail.

Mrs. O'Toole was relieved. She had heard glowing accounts of the woman from Myrtle, and here was a chance to get acquainted with her. The story of the little lost princess had touched her warm heart, and also her curiosity. Her visit would be something to tell the neighbors. She wished that she had worn a better dress and fixed her hair.

The Princess looked up and smiled at Sammy's shout of "Ma, just look at all the mangle-worms!"

That broke the ice, and soon the two women were deep in conversation about the Castle and what the Princess hoped that it might mean to the children.

“Half the trouble with the children of to-day is that they are not kept happily busy. Idle hands and brains mean mischief,” said the Princess.

Mrs. O’Toole nodded assent. “It is a good work you are doing and a blessing you bring to the mothers of the neighborhood. If there is anything I can do to help, let me know. I’ll be proud to help you. Heaven help you find the little one you have lost.”

The Princess entered the Castle with a pleased look in her eyes. The friendship of the mothers would mean a great deal in determining the success of her experiment.

It was destined to be a very busy morning, for hardly had she seated herself when the back-door bell rang. Aunt Sally was

in the kitchen, so the Princess paid no attention to the fact.

Aunt Sally was just removing a huge pan full of crisp cookies with raisin centers from the oven when the bell rang. Through the open screen door she saw a shabby, half-grown boy with a big bundle in his arms. He was sniffing at the cookie-scented air and Aunt Sally grinned. Feeding people was her especial delight, and any appreciation of her culinary power filled her with unbounded pride.

She opened the door and invited him in. What she had thought was a huge bundle turned out to be a very tiny little girl not much over two years old. The boy was shabby but clean, and the little girl was spotless.

“Please may I park my baby here?” he asked, stepping over the worn doorstep.

Aunt Sally did not understand. The popular use of the term “park” was neither in her experience nor her vocabulary.

“Park? Park,” she repeated.

“Sure,” replied the boy with a wide grin, “leave her here when I go to peddle my papers. You run this place for kids, don’t you? A kid that lives down the block a way said that you did, so thinks I to myself, that it would be the very place for Marjie.”

“Haven’t you got any folks to leave her with?” replied Aunt Sally. “It seems kinder funny to have to leave her with strangers.”

The boy flushed. “Mother’s dead,” he replied, “and I’ve been looking after her ever since. I used to leave her with a lady that lived in the block but she has moved. I paid her a dollar and a quarter a week and I’d give more than that to get her in here.”

Aunt Sally hesitated. Of course the house was always open to children, but they were children old enough to take care of themselves, and with so young a child

as Marjorie, it would be a tremendous responsibility. However, the place was being run to fill the needs of children, and it would be a shame to turn away any child. Aunt Sally was very glad that she did not have the responsibility of deciding. She turned toward the door.

“Yo’ jes’ wait till I go and speak to my Miss Virginia,” she said, “ ’cause she’ll know jes’ what to do.”

While she was out of the room, the boy’s quick eyes noticed several things which pleased him. There were some cookie-cutters of shining tin in various shapes pleasing to little folk. They reminded him of the cookies that his mother had made for him when he was a little boy.

Sammy and Jenny had followed the Princess to the house, and lured by the spicy odor of newly-baked cookies had made their way to the kitchen. Now they were seated on the doorstep. Jenny still held the doll in one hand. In the other

she had a cookie rabbit. She had already nibbled off one of his ears and had commenced on the other one. Sammy was not so particular. He had plunged into the middle of his elephant and was smeared with cookie crumbs up to his ears.

In a short time Aunt Sally returned followed by the very prettiest young lady that Dick had ever seen. Instinctively his hand went up to his tattered hat, although it had not occurred to him to remove it when he had entered the house. More than ever he desired to get Marjorie into this paradise of children presided over by this golden lady.

She questioned him gently.

"Mother's dead," he told her, "she died before Marjie was a year old. I promised her I would always take care of Marjie. It isn't so hard to earn money to pay for her, for I'm sixteen even if I do seem so small, but it's hard to find anybody to take

care of her. One of the fellers down the street a way told me about you, so I brought her."

"Who took care of her before?" asked the Princess.

"Old Mrs. Smith who lives in our block. I used to pay her every week and buy milk extra. She's moved away now. I s'pose I could take her to a Day Nursery only it is 'way over at the other side of the city, and I am afraid they might think that I was too young to keep her.

"I am willing to pay even more to you for the sake of the green grass and—er—cookies," he went on. "It ain't healthy for babies to stay shut up all the time in houses. It kinder fades them out."

The Princess liked Dick. She liked his clear gray eyes that never wavered as they met her own. She liked the considerate way that he held his little sister, and his business-like manner. It was re-

freshing to meet with such pluck in one so young. She determined to do all in her power to help him.

“We will try it a week,” she said, “by that time we shall know whether it is practical or not. I would like to make one suggestion. You may pay me whatever you consider right, but I would like to use that money for her clothing. Some of my little girl friends want to learn how to sew, and I am sure that they would much rather dress a real live baby than mere dolls.”

Dick’s eyes beamed approval. Clothes had been the one difficulty in his task of caring for Marjorie. The task of buying the various little garments had always been a source of embarrassment to him. The joy of getting Marjorie cared for and clothed made it seem as though a heavy load had been rolled from his shoulders.

“What time will you call for Marjorie?” asked the Princess.

Dick hesitated. He did not want to appear grasping, yet his very best chances for selling papers came after six o'clock when the working men were on their way home.

The Princess noticed his hesitation and guessed at its cause.

"There is no real hurry," she told him, "for I am banking upon Betty and Myrtle to help take care of her after school. Playing house is one of their favorite games, and Marjorie will be a pleasant addition to their resources."

Dick went off with a much lighter heart than he had carried since the kindly Mrs. Smith had left town. In his mind was a new ideal, and he silently resolved that the kind young lady should never regret her gracious act if he could help it. He wished that he might do something to show his gratitude.

Meanwhile the Princess was inspecting her new treasure. The treasure looked

with grave blue eyes out of a tangle of yellow curls. She was a pretty baby thing and looked as though she were good, as well.

Aunt Sally held out her arms, but the child shrank back against the Princess's shoulder. However, by bribery in the shape of a marvelous crisp cookie pig, the wily Aunt Sally won a smile from her lips. Both women continued their observation of this new addition to the Child Garden, as the Princess sometimes called the Brown Castle.

Yes, Marjorie was pretty, although the pretty curls had been unevenly cut with a pair of dull scissors and her feminine petticoats were conspicuous by their absence. Dick was a boy and had dressed his sister according to a boy's ideas. Marjorie wore a pair of tiny blue overalls neatly turned up at the cuff. Over this was pulled a boy's slip-on sweater, while on

the cropped head was a cap distinctly boyish in outline.

After another cookie all around, the children returned to the yard, and for the first time in all her life Marjorie crept and toddled over the green grass. It was a wonderful morning for her. She pulled at the golden dandelions with little gurgles of joy and murmured, "Pitty, pitty," over and over again. Aunt Sally, at the window keeping track of her, smiled to see her pleasure.

Later in the morning she was brought into the house gloriously dirty and blissfully happy. A liberal application of soap and water improved her looks immensely, after which orange-juice and oatmeal disappeared in short order. Again made sweet and clean, she was popped into the bed for the nap that she was perfectly ready for.

While she was sleeping, the Princess



went up into the garret to rummage. From the darkest corner she drew out a small white rocking-chair and a high-chair which both the first princess and the second princess had used in the days of their babyhood. These she dusted and brought to the head of the stairs.

Farther search revealed an old chest packed with baby things of other days. From it she drew forth little old-fashioned baby dresses that had been worn long ago by her own mother. Tenderly she smoothed out the wrinkles and shook them out. They were quaint little dresses with queer puffed sleeves and odd patterns. However, they would do until something better could be made.

That afternoon little Marjorie had a long nap on the Princess's bed. Clasped in her arms was "Mahee Murhee" (Maggie Murphy) the rag doll that had done service when the Princess herself had been a little girl, and even

before that when it had belonged to the first princess.

It was late when she awoke. The Princess had barely time to get her dressed before school was out and it was time for the children. What would they think about the new addition to the Brown Castle's charms? The Princess smiled in anticipation.

What they did think was expressed by exclamations of delight. It was wonderful to have a real baby to play house with. Sammy and Jenny were all very well but they did not go around among four little girls. Marjorie fortunately was a sweet-tempered baby, who delighted in being wheeled in the old baby-carriage found in the barn, and in being dressed up and fussed over.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WINNING OF REDDY O'TOOLE

WITH the exception of Reddy O'Toole, the whole neighborhood of children had found a new interest. With him the whole world seemed plunged in gloom. At first, fiery anger that matched the brilliancy of the color of his hair was in his heart, not only for the Princess but for the gang and the girls that had betrayed his plans. Then came loneliness.

At a single call from one of the boys of his old gang he would have been back with them. They, however, angry at his desertion, left him entirely to his own resources, and pride kept him from joining them unbidden.

He moped about the house in a manner that nearly drove his mother distracted. He teased the little O'Tooles to tears and pestered Muff, the cat, until she inflicted a long scratch on one of his arms. Finally his mother, unable to stand the confusion longer, drove him out of the house with a command for him to keep out of her sight until supper time. Was there ever a boy so much abused? Reddy thought not.

He sat down on the top step with his chin cupped in his hand. He was quite the unhappiest boy in town. The other boys were playing ball in back of the Castle. He could hear them shouting in the distance and he drew his cap low over his eyes with a scowl.

Betty coming down the stairs on her way to the Castle paused a moment on the top stair. Although in disfavor with Reddy for the part she had played in warning the Princess of his plans, her heart went out to him in sympathy. It would

be dreadful to lose all one's friends as he seemed to have lost his.

She was not afraid of him in spite of the fact that he knew what she had done, for they had always been pretty good friends. Ever since he had knocked over the big Daniels boy and made him return the hair-ribbon that he had pulled from her hair, she had liked him and had been grateful. She hated to have him exiled from all the good times they were having.

Betty would have liked to stop and talk with him. Perhaps she could persuade him to come with her. One look, however, at his stormy face made her realize that her hope was a vain one.

"Hello, Reddy," she said, as she came down the stairs.

"Hello, Betty," he answered rather gruffly but that was all. She went down the street rather slowly toward the Castle.

Somehow, after that friendly greeting,

Reddy did not feel quite so bitter. Some one at least 'did not hate him. Five minutes before, all his world seemed against him, but a smile and a greeting had changed all that. He thrust his hands deep into his pockets and strolled down the street.

The Princess saw him as he passed the Castle and waved a friendly hand, but he paid no attention to the gesture. She might win the affections of the other boys with her smiles and her doughnuts, but they were not for him.

He noticed also the ball game that was being played in the yard. The gang were playing against the River Street Sluggers and Brick was pitching. Reddy, himself, was their regular pitcher and had helped his side score some brilliant victories. It was hard to see Brick in his old place. Brick made a better catcher than pitcher, anyhow. He went by slowly, for he

hoped they would see and call to him, but they were too interested in their game. He passed by unseen.

About a mile from the Castle in one of the older parts of the city was an old blacksmith's shop with a new garage attached to it. It was to this place that Reddy made his way. He liked to see the red-hot, glowing coals. Sometimes he dropped little pieces of iron into the fire to see them glow red, then white. The blacksmith was a jolly, friendly man, and Reddy was fond of him. Sometimes he let Reddy do small jobs for him, paying him with pennies and occasionally a nickel.

This week there was a new attraction at the blacksmith's shop that filled his boyish soul with delight. Old Molly, the Smith's collie dog, had a new litter of puppies. Round fuzzy balls of fluff they were, nestled snugly up to their mother's warm side.

Old Molly thumped with her tail at Reddy's approach, for he was an old friend that she both knew and trusted. With a cry of delight he dropped down on his knees by her side and one by one lifted the puppies up for closer inspection. Three of them were like their mother, miniature models of what an orthodox collie puppy should be, but the fourth was different. It was hard to believe that he belonged to the same litter.

He was larger and more lively than the other three. In fact it was the only one among them that had its eyes open at all. Bleared baby eyes they were, not as yet of any use to him. About his eyes, presenting a comical appearance of spectacles, were two dark rings. One ear was jauntily upright, while the other flapped downward, giving him a piquant expression.

The blacksmith shook his head over him.

"I can get a good price for the others," he said. "They are all that collie puppies should be. They are chips straight off the old block," he added affectionately rubbing Molly between her ears, "but this little fellow is all wrong. I am afraid I'll have to drown him or give him away."

Reddy looked at the man in amazement. Why, the darker puppy was the best in the lot, he thought. He would rather own him than any one of the others. To drown that appealing ball of fuzz! The idea was unthinkable.

The blacksmith's eyes twinkled. He noticed the boy's preference and thought he saw a way to get rid of the puppy as well as getting rid of a certain piece of work that he was dreading.

"See here, bub," he said good-naturedly, "I'll make a business proposition to you. What say?"

Reddy looked at him with eagerness. A business proposition sounded pretty

grown-up and dignified to his ears.

"I'll give you," went on the blacksmith very impressively, "I'll give you that pup for your very own if you will clear up every bit of this scrap iron and put it into a pile for me. It's a pretty stiff piece of work, I will warn you now, and it will probably take you some time, but if you want the little fellow bad enough to work for him, he is yours."

Vastly overjoyed, Reddy at once pitched into work with all the energy he was capable of. For an hour he stuck to it, and although at the end of the hour he had collected quite a pile of rusted iron scraps, there was no noticeable improvement of the condition of the floor. However, the blacksmith relieved him by saying that the puppy would not be ready to leave its mother for several weeks.

Every night after school he went to the blacksmith's shop to work. His resentment towards the gang diminished, and his

interest in their activities also. What was their attitude to him when he was going to have a companion like that puppy? He swelled with pride at the thought of displaying the puppy. He thought that when the boys saw the puppy, they would be glad to see him, too.

It was a big day for Reddy when the puppy first tumbled out of his box and came wabbling to meet him on uncertain, sprawling legs.

The days went by. The pile grew bigger and bigger while the iron scraps on the floor diminished. The puppy grew, too. Reddy was very sure that it recognized him and was glad to see him. Sore, bleeding fingers did not mean much to him when considered as a price for what he was getting.

Finally the work was all done and done to the approval of the blacksmith. It was a wonderful moment when the blacksmith put the puppy into his arms with a hearty,

“Well, son, you have done a hard piece of work and have done it well. You have certainly earned your pet.”

It was a red-letter journey back home with the puppy snugly rolled up in his sweater.

It was not until he was nearly home that he began to wonder what his mother would say about the addition to the family. There were eight mouths to fill in the O'Toole family, and money was not plentiful. Besides this, the O'Tooles lived in four rooms on the third floor of a big apartment-house. It was therefore with some apprehensions that he pushed open the door of his home. His only hope was that his puppy would prove as irresistible to his mother as it had to him.

His apprehensions were well founded. What Mrs. O'Toole said about puppies in general and collies in particular, combined with what she had to say about dogs living on the third-story-up and his lack of

intelligence in bringing one home, would have filled a good-sized book.

Dogs were nuisances. They barked during the night; they snapped at babies; they chewed things up; and they got hair all over parlor furniture.

Reddy's retort that they kept away thieves and found things that were lost was discredited.

"I guess that your father can tackle any thief that breaks into this house without the aid of a half-grown pup," she told him sarcastically. "If he can't, well, then, I'll help him out myself. No, sir, you can just take that puppy away, and don't you dare come back till you get rid of him."

Reddy winked back the tears savagely. His miserable eyes met Myrtle's sympathetic ones.

"What can I do with him, Ma?" he asked gruffly, trying to hide the quiver in his voice.

"Do with him? Do with him?" she

snapped. "I don't care what you do with him as long as you get rid of him. Take him back where you got him from, 'drown him, give him away."

It was Myrtle who came to Reddy's rescue temporarily. Sorry for Reddy, and past mistress of the art of getting her own way, she coaxed her mother to let the puppy stay for just one night. The blacksmith shop would be closed for it was getting late. Reddy could take him back in the morning as it was Saturday. With very poor grace Mrs. O'Toole relented. Yes, he could stay that night.

Reddy wanted the puppy to sleep with him, but upon this proposal his mother put down her foot. The puppy was to sleep in the kitchen.

Poor puppy! How was he to know that he should be on his best behavior? He welcomed Muff with enthusiasm. To his doggish mind, cats were provided for his own especial amusement. Muff had

had other encounters with dogs. She was mistress of the situation, and the lessons that she gave those who meddled with her were very drastic. With his tail between his legs, the puppy took refuge under the stove.

It was his first night away from home and mother. He was feeling lonesome. After the various members of the household had gone to bed he cried, soft plaintive little whines at first, then loud yelps.

Finally Reddy, unable to stand it any longer slipped from bed dragging his pillow and blankets with him. Into the kitchen he groped. The puppy greeted him with noisy manifestations of joy. Curled up in a little ball by the stove with the puppy in his arms he slept until morning.

Reddy woke early, but the puppy woke earlier. It was very unfortunate that he should have found Mr. O'Toole's shoe.

Leather has an agreeable taste and is an excellent thing on which to cut baby teeth. He shook that shoe and he worried that shoe. He pulled out the tongue and pierced it with his sharp little teeth. Then he turned his attention to Jenny's doll.

That 'doll was an enemy. He felt it in his bones. She was an enemy to be killed. He killed her with vigor. His pointed little teeth pierced her kid body, and teaspoonfuls of sawdust streamed from the wounds. One arm snapped off. Handfuls of hair lay on the kitchen floor.

Then, vastly proud of his deeds of valor, he grasped her firmly by the wig and trotted over to the sleeping Reddy. That dazed individual awoke to find himself covered with sawdust. Itchy sawdust was running down his neck. There was his puppy shaking the remains of Jenny's doll in his face and on the floor beside him

was his father's much-bitten shoe. Reddy felt that he was in the midst of a nightmare.

At this very moment his father entered the room with his alarm-clock in his hand. One glance told him the whole story. His bare foot shot out and caught the surprised puppy at about his middle. What he said both to Reddy and the puppy isn't fit to repeat. They were in disgrace. Sentence was deferred until after breakfast. Then it came crushingly. Reddy must get rid of the puppy. He need not come home until it was off his hands.

The tears that he had crowded back the night before welled up into his eyes and slipped unheeded down his cheeks. The puppy, somehow feeling that his little master was in trouble, licked his hand with his wee scrap of a pink tongue. Reddy squeezed him until he yelped in astonishment.

He sat down on the outside doorstep

to think things over and plan what was best to be done. One thing was certain. Reddy would not drown his pet, even though that breakfast would be the last he ever ate at home. He hated to give the puppy away, and did not dare to take him back to the blacksmith because he, too, had mentioned that he might have to be drowned.

As he sat there, Betty came running down the stairs with a milk-bottle in her hand. At the sight of Reddy's burden, she dropped down on the steps beside him with a little cry of delight. She gathered the puppy into her arms and kissed him on the soft fur between his eyes.

With a little girl's intuition she divined the cause of Reddy's unhappiness and grieved for him. She was filled with sympathy and a desire to help. But how? Grandmother hated pets of all kinds, and Betty herself could see that one room, three flights up, would never do for even a well-

behaved dog, to say nothing of a mischievous puppy. She wrinkled up her forehead in her endeavor to think of a good plan. Suddenly she laid her hand on his sleeve.

“Oh, Reddy, I know just the thing!” she cried, her eyes sparkling with delight. “I believe the Princess would take him. She used to have a lovely dog that she loved ’most to pieces. She was telling us about him the other day, and I know she misses him. You just take him to her.”

Reddy hung back. His behavior toward the Princess had begun to seem very childish and he was ashamed of it, but it was very hard to admit it. But then there was the dog to consider, and it did seem to be the only thing to do.

“I don’t like to, Betty,” he said frankly. “I treated her as mean as dirt, and it does seem awfully bold to ask her to do something for me.”

Betty nodded understandingly. “I

know just how you feel," she replied, "but I know too that she doesn't lay up any grudge against you, for I heard her tell Aunt Sally that she hoped that you'd come some time. Besides, think how lovely it would be for the puppy to live at the Castle."

She had touched the right chord. Reluctantly he arose.

"I wish you'd go, too," he said.

"Grandmother is waiting for me to get her breakfast," replied Betty. "I'd go with you if it wasn't for that. I'm glad you are going, for I hate to have you left out of all our good times. Besides, we have all missed you."

Rather reluctantly and slowly he went down the street with the puppy snugly held under his arm. It was hard to admit to the Princess that he had acted badly toward her, but something inside told him that it was the thing to do.

Aunt Sally saw him coming, and to the

woman who had raised several boys there was a droop to his shoulders that told her he was in trouble. She hastily sought out her mistress.

“Dat little red-headed boy what won’t play in our yard is headed dis way, and he sure ‘do look like the world ain’t been treatin’ him right. You jes’ run down and see what’s de matter wid him.”

Catching up a broad-brimmed hat and pruning-shears, she hurried down to the lilac-bush which was nearest to the gate. She was busily cutting off the unnecessary shoots when he reached the gate. He paused and looked at her with puzzled eyes, not knowing just how to say what he wanted to say. The Princess, seeing the tear-smudged face and the puppy, knowing as much as she ‘did about the small quarters at the boy’s home, guessed pretty accurately the state of affairs.

“That is a very pretty puppy that you have there,” she pleasantly remarked, “and

he looks as if he were going to grow into a splendid dog."

Reddy glowed with pride. "I had to work awf'ly hard for him," he replied.

She nodded understandingly. "You would have to," she responded. "I want a dog for this place, but I haven't located a good one yet. Perhaps I could get one where you got yours. I don't suppose I could get yours for love or money?"

At her question the boy looked up with sudden hope in his eyes. "You can have him free for nothing," he cried joyfully, although with a little pang at his heart as he remembered all the scrap iron he had carried, and that wonderful moment when the blacksmith had put him into his arms for good.

The Princess smiled very understandingly. "He can still be yours, Reddy, and yet live here with me. Every day you can come and see him."

Then Reddy surprised both himself and

the Princess. He dropped the puppy at her feet and impulsively threw both arms about her. "I am sorry I acted so mean," he whispered. "Gee, you're a peach, all right." Then, horribly embarrassed, he was off like the wind.

Aunt Sally from her window, where she had been an interested spectator, chuckled softly. "A wise lady is my Miss Virginia," she said.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PLAYHOUSE

MAY was nearly over and the lilacs were in bloom. The air of desertion that had so long brooded over the brown house was completely gone. The whole place gave one a feeling of welcome and comfort. Many children came and went as they pleased, but to the children who had discovered the Princess and to the boys of the gang, it seemed especially theirs. They could hardly wait for the summer vacation to come.

In the side yard was a community garden divided up into a regular checkerboard by string and pegs. Already little rows of green things gave promise of treasures to follow. Each member of the

gang owned a small patch of earth, and even some of the little girls had staked out claims.

They were telltales, these small gardens. They told much to any one who could understand their language. Tubby's garden was more or less neglected, for Tubby was undeniably lazy. Spud and Reddy had gone into partnership. They had planted potatoes with fond hopes of turning a pretty penny upon the product of their labors. Each had much pride in his patch of well-weeded potatoes.

Myrtle had wanted to go into partnership with Betty and raise flowers, but Betty had refused.

"I am going to plant pumpkins and squash and turnips and things so we won't have to spend so much money this next winter," she explained one afternoon, as she sat with Myrtle and the Princess upon the piazza. "I'd just love to plant flowers, though," she added.

Myrtle was generous and impulsive. She put her arm about her friend. She understood the poverty of her friend's life and knew that sometimes there was so little food in the house that Betty was hungry. Often a part of Mrs. O'Toole's Saturday's baking found its way to Betty's house.

"You can have all of my flowers that you want," she promised, "and we will fill every room in the Castle with bunches of them."

"I wish I could sell some of my vegetables and get a lot of money for them," said Betty wistfully.

"What would you do with it?" asked the Princess. It seemed strange to her that so young a little girl should lay so much importance on money. She had never felt the pinch of not having enough, and Betty's words made her wonder if the little girl were greedy.

"Oh, there are lots of things that I'd get," replied Betty, "new dresses and coal

for winter and to cook with, and things for Grandma. We sometimes play we have a million dollars and tell what we would do with it. It is a pleasant game."

"Well," cut in Myrtle, "I know what I would do if I should have a million dollars and I'd do it pretty quick, too. You can't imagine how sick and tired I get of having Frances, Jenny, and Sammy in the same room with me. The beds are put in so close that I have no room to keep my things at all. Frances is the oldest and she's in high school, so she feels as if she ought to have most of the room, and the twins are into everything. I'd move into a much bigger apartment."

"Oh, look," cried Betty, hastily springing up from her seat. "Marjorie Jones is right in the middle of Reddy's garden."

Away she sped to drag the mischievous one away from Reddy's cherished patch. Fortunately it was not damaged badly. Marjorie, resenting the interference,

howled lustily, and the subject of cramped quarters was forgotten for the time being.

"I am going to get a clothes-line from Aunt Sally and tie it around this child and hitch her to the tree where Reddy's puppy is tied," Betty panted, as she approached the group on the steps.

"Children are such a care," said Myrtle so pensively that both the Princess and Betty laughed.

"You ought to know," said the Princess.

"I wish we had some at our house," sighed Betty. "I used to tease Mother to buy a little sister for me when I was too little to know that you couldn't buy babies at the store. Now I pretend that Marjorie is my little sister."

"You take beautiful care of her," said the Princess, smiling and laying her hand on the curly head. "I don't know what I would do without your help."

That evening the Princess and Aunt Sally discussed the question brought up by

Myrtle. Having always lived in a large house with spacious grounds, it was hard to imagine two or three children to one room, but the Princess could see how hard it must be to live so crowded a life.

“They ought to have some privacy,” she told Aunt Sally. “And that reminds me of another question that bothers me,” she went on. “We ought to make some provision for rainy days. Vacation is coming, and of all times when children need to be kept busy and happy, vacation is the most important. The house is large, but we haven’t fixed it up yet, and large as it is, there is not room for from ten to fourteen children to really enjoy themselves.”

Aunt Sally wrinkled up her forehead as she always did when she was perplexed. She was as interested in the success of the Brown Castle as was her mistress. She also felt a deep responsibility for she had promised the crotchety old grandfather

that she would take the best possible care of her mistress and also do all in her power to help her.

“Dere’s de old stable, Miss Virginia. It’s filled up with rubbish and old furniture, but I reckon from ‘de looks of de outside that there are two or three rooms upstairs and lots of jumpin’-room downstairs,” she finally suggested.

“Aunt Sally, you are a genius,” exclaimed the Princess. “I wonder why I did not think of that before. Grandfather used to say there were several rooms up there where the coachman and his family used to live.”

Aunt Sally beamed. She was not sure she knew what a genius was, but it sounded well, and she knew that her young mistress was pleased.

“You might hire dat Dick to help clean it out. He’s got a wise head on him, and I bet he could manage dem gang boys and

get things done in style," she continued.

"He is late to-night, fortunately," replied the Princess, "so we shall be able to tell him. He told me this morning that somebody had given him work from six to eight. It seems wrong that so much responsibility should be laid on such young shoulders."

"Speakin' bout angels and such-like, dere is the bell dis blessed minute," exclaimed Aunt Sally, rising quickly and bustling out of the room.

Dick's face brightened as he was ushered into the cheery room. The tiny fire which had been lighted in the fireplace gave forth a pleasant glow. They did not really need a fire, for the night was not cold, but it surely did add to the comfort and homelike atmosphere of the room. The furniture was old and seemed to "belong," as Dick thought to himself. The Princess was very good to look upon. Dick found himself many times during the

day looking forward to going for Marjorie.

That small person was curled up like a kitten on the lounge with Mahee Murhee in her arms. It was long after Sleepy-Man time, and she was asleep. Reddy's puppy was close beside her. It lifted its head and growled softly as Dick entered, but upon hearing the sound of his voice thumped several times with his tail and again went to sleep.

The Princess held out her hand.

"Did you have a successful day?" she asked.

"Fairly so," was the response, "this evening job has brought in quite a bit extra. I'm in luck."

"That is good. Have you any time for another piece of work?" she asked.

He grinned. "Lead me to it," was his reply. "I just eat up work of all kinds."

With Aunt Sally's help she told him of her plans to make a playhouse out of the

old stable for the little girls and a playroom downstairs. The plan met with his approval and enthusiasm.

“To-morrow’s Saturday and the boys are not going to school. That Reddy is a smart one and we’re pretty good friends. I know some of the other fellows in his gang and they are good workers, too. We ought to make things hum, the whole of us.”

“Then you will be able to help us out?” questioned the Princess.

“You bet,” was the hearty response.

“But what about your papers?” queried Aunt Sally. “You won’t lose de folks dat buys ’em, I hope?”

“Things are working out pretty well for this week,” replied the boy. “To-day I ran across an old chum of mine who is down on his luck. His brother used to have this route that I have now, so he knows all about it. He can deliver his papers and then peddle for me afterwards. I’ll give

him enough to make it worth his time."

"That is good," answered the Princess. "We'll expect you to stay with us then, to-morrow."

The next morning he arrived very promptly at eight o'clock and the gang soon made their appearance. The new plan met with their unanimous approval, and under Dick's capable management set to work with a will.

The lower part of the old stable was piled full of things that had come to the end of their period of usefulness. Two very old-fashioned vehicles were pulled out into the yard to wait for the junk-man. One was an upholstered sleigh; the other was a one-seated buggy.

In dislodging the seat of the sleigh Reddy discovered a small hole. Farther investigation disclosed a soft, cotton-lined nest with baby mice in it. The mice were tiny and pink. They were so young that their eyes had not yet opened. At

Reddy's excited call, the other children hurried to see his discovery, much to the distress of mother mouse, scurrying across the floor in great perturbation.

Other surprising things came to light. There was any quantity of discarded furniture, furniture considered too old for use twenty-five years before. Some of it the Princess considered valuable. That was to be sent South. The rest she decided to sell.

"I think we will devote the proceeds to fitting up the lower part of the building for a small gymnasium," said the Princess. "We will put up a swing or two, and a small trapeze. Some rings could be put up to swing upon, and maybe we shall have room enough for parallel bars."

The boys gave a whoop of delight at this pleasing prospect and pitched into work harder than before, as if they were determined to earn their gymnasium as quickly as possible.

While the boys were struggling with heavy furniture and rubbish downstairs, the girls were having a tussle upstairs with heavy coats of dust and cob-webs. There were three rooms above the stable which had been used by the coachman. They were completely furnished with pretty but cheap furniture.

Perhaps you can imagine the bliss of little girls living in crowded tenements at having three whole rooms furnished for their own use. Many of them lived with father, mother, brothers, and sisters in rooms neither so big nor pleasant.

The gable windows were a particular delight, for not only were they small and set into the wall in a pleasing fashion, but they were diamond-paned and let in a flood of sunlight.

"I am going to bring over my geranium plant that I got at Sunday school and keep it in this window," announced Betty in great satisfaction. "It never gets a bit of

sun at home and it is getting all yellow and straggly."

"Come on, let's start to clean," said Myrtle energetically. "You take the rugs out and shake them and I will scrub the floor."

"Can you?" asked Grace rather doubtfully.

"I guess so," replied the undaunted Myrtle. "I've helped do it at home lots of times."

It was hard work to carry the pails of water up the narrow stairs, but Myrtle finally accomplished it. Scrubbing a floor streaked with the dirt of years was no light task for the slender arms, but Myrtle's courage and persistence were unlimited.

In the middle of the job Tubby came up the stairs on a tour of investigation. Possibly he was tired of helping the boys. At all events he was in a tormenting frame of mind.

After poking about, much to the dis-

tress of the little girls, he began to jeer at Myrtle's attempts at floor-washing. Now Myrtle possessed a temper. It matched the color of her brother's hair. Some people said that it should have been Myrtle who had the red hair.

The tormenting Tubby did not see the danger signals. Had he done so, it is most probable that he would have stopped his teasing, for he had had sad experiences with Myrtle's temper before. In pulling off Betty's ribbon he went a step too far.

Myrtle attacked him with the business end of the mop. Although he backed hastily away, the dripping, dirty thing came in contact with his face. Blinded with dirty water, he stepped forward to avenge his wrong. It was unfortunate that he stepped heavily on a bar of very slippery soap. He slipped and fell, landing in a sitting position directly in the big tub of soapy, dirty water.

A howl from Tubby and a shriek of

laughter from the girls brought the rest of the boys upstairs on the run. One look at the victim firmly wedged in the tub surrounded with the puddle of dirty water set them all off, and peal after peal of laughter rang out. Indeed, so overwhelming was the general mirth that it was some time before the unfortunate Tubby could be rescued from his predicament.

“Tubby, Tubby, in a tubby!” shouted one boy.

“Tubby, Tubby, Wash-Tubby!” cried Reddy.

Poor abused Tubby went home to change his dripping clothes. I grieve to say that he told his indignant mother that Myrtle O'Toole had pushed him into a tub of water.

At any rate, it was a long time before he annoyed the little girls again, and to his great disgust the name “Wash-Tub” settled on him, apparently for life.

CHAPTER NINE

THE GATE-LEG TABLE

THE junk-man called that afternoon and carted away the sleigh, the carriage, and the cheapest of the old furniture. Some of it was removed to the garret of the Castle and some of it was appropriated by the little girls farther to embellish their new tenement. An old cradle was hailed with delight.

“There now, Marjorie Jones, you have got to have a nap,” cried Betty, pouncing upon that small person who was placidly sucking her thumb.

Marjorie had other notions.

“No nap,” she remarked promptly rolling out of the cradle on the opposite side.

Betty caught her up and bundled her over to the big bed for a frolic, much to

Marjorie's joy. After a few minutes of play she returned to her scrubbing.

"Funny, isn't it?" said Myrtle thoughtfully. "Here we are scrubbing floors and polishing windows with all our might and main and we're having lots of fun, and if we were at home and had to do it, we would think we were awfully abused."

The floors did show improvement in spite of sundry streaks and smudges, but it was a tired group of little girls that finally settled down upon the Princess's front piazza. A bedraggled set of little girls, too, although each had been protected by apron and dust-cap. Aunt Sally was one broad grin as she watched them come up the path.

"Guess dat old coach-house mus' be pretty clean, jedgin' from the looks of dem children. Looks like dey used demselves for mops and dusters."

She chuckled as she departed kitchenward in quest of soap, a wash-basin, and

towels. These she laid out in readiness for the arrival of those in need of them.

After as much dirt was removed as was possible, the girls flocked back to the piazza to give their Princess an account of their activities.

The boys had also stopped work and were engaged in baseball in the back yard. Even Dick, busy man as he usually was, had laid aside his coat and had pitched into the game with all the vigor and enjoyment he was capable of.

It was a peaceful time. Little Marjorie had curled up with a sleepy sound of contentment in Betty's arms, plainly ready for the nap that she had refused half an hour before. Betty herself was lying in the hammock, her curly head close to Marjorie's. The Princess sat in a low rocker sewing, with Myrtle at her feet, while Doris fondled the cat.

It made a very pretty picture, thought the lonely young doctor, whose office was

across the way, and he found himself wishing that he were there, too.

"Please tell us a story, Princess," begged Myrtle. "It is such a sleepy afternoon that I feel just like stories, somehow."

"Oh, yes," cried Doris, spilling Babette out of her lap and hastening to join Myrtle in her pleading.

"Tell a true story," put in Betty from the hammock. "You know that you promised to tell us the story of the gate-leg table the last time we were playing house under it."

The Princess smiled and the children waited. They knew that if they were only patient enough, a story would be forthcoming, and soon the Princess began:

"There was a great deal of excitement in Great-great-grandmother Anne's house one spring a great many years ago, for Great-grandmother Anne was getting married that June, and there was much to be done.

“All during the spring they had been very busy with spinning-wheel, loom, needle, and thread.

“In those days people did not go to the store when they wished to buy cloth for their dresses as they do in these times. Nearly all the cloth had to be woven on big looms from wool or flax threads, which had been spun and twisted on the spinning-wheel.

“It is true that Anne’s wedding gown was much finer than anything she could have made herself. Had not it been brought to her from England, where the skilled hands of the nuns in the convent had wrought each bud and flower of the intricate design? She sometimes wondered about them as she tenderly smoothed the rare stuff. Were they happy, those sheltered nuns, to make such a beautiful wedding gown when they themselves could never realize the joys of married life?

“Most of her equipment was the work

of her own hands. She was very proud of her finely woven linen towels and tablecloths. Her blue-and-white woven bedspread filled her soul with delight. No other bride in all her memory had a finer or more complete outfit. None other had a chest more beautiful or better filled than her own. No other had a better-looking or nobler bridegroom than Albert Claflin.

"The wedding was a milestone in the history of the village. It was a perfect day. People were most kind, and she was marrying the best man in all the whole wide world.

"Time went on. Life in the new home was strenuous with the coming of Sarah, Isobel, Maria and Sophia, Rebecca and Emily, and finally the two little boys, Evarts and Fred. People had large families in those days, and Anne was very busy.

"She made a splendid farmer's wife,

also. Besides cooking and sewing for her big family, she made quantities of butter and cheese from the milk that was produced so abundantly.

“Now pantry space was scarce at the Claflin house and the big pans of milk took up room. One afternoon old Mrs. Pond came to call and commented upon the small quarters.

“‘You need an extra table, Anne,’ she said, ‘and I think I can help you out. Down in our cellar is a very old table that has been discarded for years as too old to use. It is pretty firm, though, and being a gate-leg, folds up into small space. I’ll tell Peleg to bring it over.’

“That is how the gate-leg table came to Grandmother Anne.

“Little Rebecca loved the old table. Under its sheltering leaves she played with her dolls. Queer dolls they were, unlike any you ever saw or probably heard about,

for they were made of corn-cobs with rude faces drawn upon them, but Rebecca loved them dearly.

“The doll that she loved best of all, however, was not a corn-cob one. It was made of china, with startling black shiny hair and pretty pink cheeks. Not many of the little girls in the neighborhood could boast of a real doll, and little Rebecca was very proud of it. When she was not playing with it, it was kept in a small mahogany box that had been made especially for her the last time that the furniture-man had called at the house.

“But time does not stand still. Little Rebecca grew up, and there was another wedding at the Claflin house. Great preparations were made. The furniture-man came for a fortnight to make massive wedding furniture. While he was at the house he saw the gate-leg table and knew what splendid workmanship it represented.

“At his suggeston it was scraped. Several little nails which had been pounded into its surface were removed and it was painted. Anne, knowing how fond her daughter was of it, gave it to her for a wedding present. It really looked like a new table, and of all Rebecca’s wedding possessions none delighted her half so well as the old gate-leg table.

“The newly-married couple came to this house to live, and as time went on, other little girls played with their dolls under its leaves. The second princess and my mother loved it, too. At Grandmother Rebecca’s death the table became the property of my mother, and of course went South with her, but it never seemed to belong there. When it was decided that I should come back to the old house, the table was to come with me. And now it stands just where it used to in Rebecca’s time when my mother used to play dolls with the second princess.”

The children went in to look at the table with new respect.

"How old is it?" whispered Betty.

"No one knows how old," replied the Princess. "It was ready for kindling-wood away back in Great-grandmother Anne's day. About a year ago a collector of antiques who loved and bought the things that used to belong to the people in the far ago times offered Mother two hundred dollars for it."

"Mercy!" cried Myrtle. "All that money for an old table? Why, you could buy a lot of new tables for that much."

"It would pay weeks and weeks of rent," said Betty, a trifle wistfully.

"What ever became of the doll?" she went on. "I mean Grandmother Rebecca's doll."

A shadow passed over the bright face of the Princess.

"It was always kept in a little mahogany

box," she replied. "Mother said that Grandmother Rebecca gave it to the second princess, but of course nobody knows now what became of it."

CHAPTER TEN

THE SHADOW

BETTY gave her skirt a little twitch and looked at Myrtle with hopeless eyes.

“It looks perfectly awful,” she said, “and I have to stand with two other girls right before the whole school and recite.”

Myrtle put her head to one side and considered. Betty’s dress had been pink once upon a time, but now had faded out nearly white. Then, too, Betty had been growing and the dress had not. It was her best one, and she loved it because it always made her think of the last really happy birthday when she had worn it first. Special occasions were few and far between, and she had not worn it for a long

time. It was above her knees, and tight at the waist.

"You'll have to let it down before the exhibition," said Myrtle. "It'll have a band of pink at the bottom, but it is better than having it up to your neck. Won't your grandmother get you a new one?"

Betty shook her head mournfully.

"She has been so sick that we had to have the doctor, and you have no idea how much money doctors charge for the littlest bottles of medicine," she replied. "She can't go out and work any more, and is all the time mumbling about orphan asylums and old ladies' homes. I just hate the name of orphan asylum."

"Have you talked about it with the Princess?" asked Myrtle, hope springing into her eyes. "I'll bet a cookie that she would get you a new dress if she knew how much you needed it."

"No, I haven't, and I am not going to, either," responded Betty. "She is doing

nice things for us all the time, and I'd be ashamed."

The dress was small and the wide pink band about the hem made it very noticeable. Betty was much ashamed to have to wear it at closing exercises, but she made up her mind that she would not let it spoil her whole day.

The last day of school was a very beautiful one. It seemed as if it had been made especially for exercises and exhibitions. The school was decked with flowers from the Princess's garden. There were piles of the nicest work laid out, so that the mothers could see what had been done. The Princess had promised to come. Betty, Myrtle, and Doris were going for her at half-past one.

Betty was not feeling very well. In fact, for the last two weeks she had not felt as much like playing as usual. Her head felt rather heavy and it seemed hard work to do the usual little tasks about the house.

Listlessly she brushed out the long yellow curls and fastened the ends back out of her eyes. It was hot hair, and she looked longingly at the scissors lying on the table. Only her promise to her grandmother kept her from ridding herself of that useless mop of hair.

The little clock on the mantel loudly proclaimed that time was flying, so she hastily slipped the patched and faded dress over her head and with twisting and turning managed to button it down the back except for the two most difficult buttons, which she reserved for Myrtle.

Then she bathed Granny's face with a towel, which she left lying near at hand. Never had duty or pleasure seemed so hard.

There was an impatient knock at the door, and Myrtle entered hastily. In her hand were two pink roses.

"Look!" she cried exultantly. "I had to go to the store for my mother and the

Princess called to me as I was going by. She gave me these. There is one for you and one for me."

With a little cry of pleasure Betty caught up the lovely thing.

"They are the first ones out," she whispered, "and she sent them to us."

Myrtle looked at her friend with keen eyes. She noticed the high color in Betty's face and her quick nervous motions.

"You don't feel awfully good, do you?" she said sympathetically; then not waiting for her friend to answer she went on, "You can go and lie down in the Princess's hammock when the exercises are over."

The exhibition was a huge success. The teacher was pleased; the parents were pleased; the children were pleased. The girls introduced the Princess to the teacher. It was pleasing to see that the teacher liked the Princess and the Princess liked the teacher.

No one noticed Betty's flushed face and over-brilliant eyes. Had any one done so, it would probably have been thought that excitement caused it.

Afterward the children gathered on the Princess's piazza to talk it all over. Betty crawled into the hammock. How much every one had to say! How noisy and confused it was! Betty pressed her thin little hands up to her forehead. The grasshoppers were singing in the tall grass. The noise on the porch seemed to get fainter and fainter and then to die away in the distance. Betty was asleep, with her head pillowed on the small balsam pillow embroidered by the second princess years before.

The others did not notice her absence for a long time. They were laying wonderful plans for the summer that was finally here. The girls were looking forward to moving their things into the coach-house. Doris and Jeanette were to

have half of the bedroom for their things, and Betty was to share the other half with Myrtle. The dining-room and kitchen were to be shared by all.

Betty was forgotten until Myrtle remembered a question she wanted to ask. Recalling Betty's tired, sick appearance, she slipped to the hammock and peeped over the high side.

"She is sound asleep," she whispered returning on tiptoe.

"Poor little girl," said the Princess. "All this excitement has tired her out. We will let her sleep until supper time."

Soon the other little girls went home to change their best dresses for something more suitable for playing, but still Betty slept. Half-past four, five o'clock, half-past five! Still Betty slept.

Several times the Princess came to peep at her, but judging that sleep would do her most good, did not disturb her. At six o'clock Aunt Sally came to look.

"Pretty lamb," she said stroking the child's forehead. "Done tired out."

As her hand came into contact with the child's hot head, she gave a start of surprise and quickly called her mistress.

"Dat chile am sick, Miss Virginia," she said. "She's jest burnin' up wid fever. You'd better get a doctor for her and let her folks know."

The Princess knew enough of Betty's home life to realize how frail the little grandmother was and how unfit she was to care for herself, to say nothing about a sick child. She promptly made up her mind to take care of the sick Betty herself, and at once dispatched Aunt Sally for the doctor.

The nearest doctor was the young man across the street, and although Aunt Sally had some doubts whether so young a man really knew much about medicines, she went after him at the order of her mistress.

Fortunately he was at home at the time,

and it was not many minutes before he was examining poor Betty. His face was quite grave as he turned to the Princess.

“She is a sick child,” he said, “it is most unfortunate, for the grandmother is absolutely unfit to care for her. I am also taking care of her and it is doubtful whether she lives much longer. I suppose the best thing to do will be take the little girl to the hospital.”

At his words, Betty cried out, “I don’t want to go away! Oh, Princess, don’t let him take me away!”

The Princess gathered her into her arms and made haste to soothe her.

“It’s all right, Betty-girl,” she said tenderly. “We are going to keep you right here until you are all well again.”

Leaving Aunt Sally to take care of Betty, the Princess hastened to tell her grandmother.

It is very hard to know just what is going to happen. Sometimes when things

seem to be going on smoothly and we think everything will continue to go that way, something happens and the whole outlook is changed. That morning everything was much as usual. Grandmother was a little feeble and had been too tired to get up, but Betty was used to that. Betty's head was heavy and it was very hot, but that was to be expected. Now everything was changed. Betty was sick.

When the Princess reached Betty's house, she was met by Mrs. O'Toole. There was relief in her eyes when she saw the Princess.

"I was just going over to your house to see if Betty was there. Her grandmother is needing her," she said, "and I wanted to tell you that she is mighty queer this afternoon. When my Myrtle went in there to see if Betty had come back from your house, the old lady didn't know her from Betty."

In a few words the Princess told of

Betty's illness, and together they went in to look at Betty's grandmother. A few minutes' visit convinced the Princess that the doctor was needed there also, and that evening the hospital ambulance stopped for the old lady.

That night Betty was feverish and talked wildly. She called for her mother and muttered broken sentences about the land and the Castle of Heart's Delight. She recognized no one, although she was quietest when the Princess's arms were about her. The doctor proclaimed her a very sick child.

For days a shadow hung over the Castle. The gay shouting of the children was hushed. Myrtle hung wistfully about, assuming the entire charge of little Marjorie.

"It seems as if I was doing it for Betty," she said as she sat one evening beside the Princess for just a moment of conference.

A long, weary time to wait it was until

one evening the doctor came away with a smile on his lips.

“I think we shall pull the little girl through,” he had just told the Princess, and her answering look had been worth everything to him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE CASTLE OF HEART'S DELIGHT

BETTY herself never knew much of what happened during her sickness. The real things of life seem to have dropped away from her, leaving confused dreams in their place.

The first time that she opened her eyes and knew where she was, it was night, for dark shadows were in the corners where the little night-lamp failed to cast its rays. The lamp itself made a small island of light in a sea of darkness. In its light where its mellow beams fell on her golden head sat the Princess, her own Princess Virginia, who somehow seemed mixed up in the dreams of the past days as the only spot of light in a black world of pain and unhappiness.

Then again her heavy eyelids closed and she was off in the world of dreams. In her dream she was seated by a rough little table in a shabby, tumble-down house in the wood. She was unhappy, for she was alone and it was getting dark. The wood outside seemed full of shadows which made her afraid.

Far away she heard a dog bark. Perhaps it was Reddy's dog. If it was, Reddy would be with him. If only she could make him hear, he would come to her.

"Come to me," she called in fear.

"To me," answered a voice far off and as faint as the call of fairy voices.

It was not Reddy's voice. She forgot about Reddy and the dog.

"Come to me," she called again.

"Come to me," answered the voice more invitingly than ever.

After all, why not? It was lonely in the cabin and she might find friends. It took all her strength to push open the big door.

It seemed as if the wind were trying to shut her in against her will.

It was quite dark. Jagged pieces of gray cloud scudded across a bleak sky, trying to shut out the stray moonbeams which were struggling through.

Paths led in all directions. They were gloomy paths bordered with tall trees that seemed to cast unfriendly shadows. Which should she take? Puzzled and confused, she turned first one way and then the other. They seemed just alike, stretching out as far as eye could see, a long weary road for little feet to travel.

As she stood there, hesitating and undecided, a tiny spark of light flashed on a huge fern near by. A firefly! She had not seen one since she had moved from the country. What was the story that her mother used to tell her? It was something about the Castle of Heart's Delight, where fireflies lit up the darkness on summer evenings.

Perhaps this firefly had come from there. Perhaps he could point out the way. Probably the very path she was on would lead her there. It was a much nicer path than the other, for it was not so big. Besides it twisted and turned instead of going straight ahead. Perhaps the Castle was just around the first bend.

The firefly flew on before her as she trudged up the twisting path. Up, up, and up, but strange to say, the higher she went the easier the path became. Once a tiny brooklet crossed her path, and before skipping lightly over it, she knelt down and drank deeply of the sparkling water.

After that the way seemed much easier. Whether the path was not as steep as it had been before or whether the water had given her new strength, she did not know or care, but after that every bit of doubt and fear was gone. Even the darkness seemed gone, for she could see that the

trees were farther apart and that there were wide, grassy places between them.

Between the vista of trees could be seen a lofty castle bigger and better than anything that Betty had ever seen, yet strangely familiar in its outline. Yes, it was just like the Brown Castle, only much bigger and more beautiful. The very flowers in the garden were fairer and smelled sweeter. The whole air was laden with the fragrance of roses and lilies.

Betty pressed forward eagerly. It was so beautiful and she was so nearly there. Surely nothing could bar her way now. But there was a barrier. A tall hedge, matted together and bearing fine needle-like points, was in her way.

Poor Betty! Was it any wonder that the tears filled her eyes or that she threw herself down upon the soft grass and cried as if her heart would break.

How long she lay there she never knew, but it seemed a long, long while. Finally

she lifted her eyes again to look at the castle. Coming down between the flower-beds was the figure of a woman. Was it the Princess?

No, she was older than the Princess. Could it be? Betty held her breath. Yes, it was her own dear mother coming to meet her. But such a different mother! All the lines of care and worry were erased from her face, and her eyes and lips held a happy smile.

Betty lifted piteous hands towards her over the hedge of thorns. Without speaking, she drew nearer. Right through the barrier she came. The thorns seemed to draw back to let her through. In another moment Betty was in her mother's arms.

They did not speak. There seemed to be no need of that. Just being together was enough. It could not last forever. In a little while Betty lifted her head. There beside them was the Princess, grave, sweet, and anxious.

With a little sigh, Betty's mother laid the child's hand in that of the Princess. Bending down she lightly kissed the child's lips and silently pointed the way down the hill.

Hand in hand with the Princess she started back down the hill, only pausing now and then to wave to the white-clad figure at the top of the hill.

Pictures then grew indistinct. The trees, path, and hill melted into one big blur. Only the face of the Princess remained, grave, sweet, and loving. Again she was in a room with her Princess bending over her.

The tide had turned for the better.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A NEW WORRY

BETTY'S recovery was rapid. The love of the Princess, the pleasant surroundings, the doctor's medicine, and the little notes that the other children sent in, all helped along. She was perfectly happy. Had not the Princess told her that Grandmother was being taken care of and that everything was going to turn out beautifully?

How lucky she was to be able to live at the Castle during her sickness! Everything in her room was pretty. The walls were cream-colored, sprinkled with blue forget-me-nots. The furniture was white-enameled. On the bed was a pale-blue cover with a lace edge. The whole room seemed designed for a little girl.

It is true that the carpet and the forget-me-nots on the wall were faded, for it had been a long time since the second princess had been a little girl and had owned the blue forget-me-not room, but that did not matter to Betty. She wondered about the second princess.

She must have loved the young man very much indeed to have been willing to leave such a lovely place. Poor second princess! Poor little Princess Anne! This room should belong to the Little Lost Anne.

Betty wished that she might be the one to find the Little Lost Anne. The Princess had done so much for her that she longed to do something big to show how grateful she was.

By the middle of July Betty was out on the piazza. It was a thin, fragile, little Betty, quite unlike the active little girl of the early summer, but it was really she,

and the girls clustered about her like bees about a sweet flower.

Of course at first they were allowed to stay only a few moments, but it was so good to see them again. In such pleasant surroundings and with such good care, Betty grew rapidly better. By the end of July she was very nearly well. The doctor was very much pleased with her progress.

As she grew better she began to think more about her grandmother. She knew that she was no longer at home, for the Princess had told her that she had gone to be cared for at a place where people knew just what to do for frail old ladies, but nothing ever was said about the time when Grandmother would come back. Betty began to worry.

Grandmother had sometimes said when things went wrong that some time she would be taken away to the Old Ladies' Home, and when that happened Betty

would become a charity child taken care of by the city. Betty had always dreaded it.

It would be terrible to leave Myrtle and the Princess. She knew how hard Dick worked so that Marjorie need not become a charity child. Orphan asylums must be terrible places.

That evening Betty timidly questioned the Princess.

"Is my grandmother in an Old Ladies' Home?" she asked, with fear in her heart and trouble in her eye.

The Princess drew her close. Never did she seem so near and dear to Betty as she did each night when she tucked her into bed.

"No, dear," she answered, "she was so sick that the doctor took her to the hospital where he might take care of her better."

Betty gave a little sigh of relief. If Dr. Graham was taking care of Grandmother everything would be all right. Hadn't

she heard Aunt Sally tell a neighbor that Dr. Graham had drawn Betty out of the Valley of the Shadow? Her fears were temporarily relieved. She had no way of knowing that her Princess was worried about her future, too.

Such, however, was the case, for the Princess knew that the little girl's grandmother could not possibly get well. She was too old and frail. What would become of Betty when her grandmother was gone? Were there relatives? How would she find out about them? It seemed perfectly natural to take her problem to the doctor for advice. He was so strong and reliable.

The very next day she told him about it, and, as she fully expected, he was eager to help. At all events he would do his best to find out if there were relatives and whether they were willing to take Betty. He promised it earnestly.

It seemed as if the surest and most reli-

able source of information would be the grandmother, but here he ran up against an unexpected barrier of opposition. At the word "relatives," Grandmother's lips closed up with a vindictive snap and remained closed. She did not deny that there were relatives. She simply refused to talk about them. His pleadings and wiles made no impression on her. He did not dare to press the point, fearing for his patient.

Mrs. O'Toole had gone through the apartment during Betty's illness, packing up things that belonged to Betty and her grandmother. The boxes had been removed to the Castle, but there had been nothing in any of them that might be considered in the light of a clue as to whether there were other relatives.

The Princess did not dare to question Betty while she was so weak and needed such careful attention. She liked to have the little girl with her, for she had grown

to love her dearly. Indeed, rather than to turn her over to the city authorities she would take her into her own home, but of course the child's relatives had the first claim, and must be found if possible.

That night Betty had a bad dream. She was standing before a grim brick building surrounded by a very solid brick wall. In this wall was a massive iron gate fastened by a padlock. Betty was with the Princess and the doctor. They were not looking at her. There was a queer desolate feeling about her heart. The gate was opened by a tall, stern-looking man. Without speaking to either the Princess or doctor, he drew Betty inside and shut the door. As the great gate clicked behind her, she awoke shivering.

So vivid was her dream and so lonesome and frightened had it made her that she could not endure to stay alone. She slipped out of bed and into the hall. The Princess heard her moving about and

called to her. In another moment she was snuggled in the Princess's arms, but all she said when questioned was that she had had a very bad dream.

From then on, a shadow seemed to hang over Betty's happiness, a dread that was never very far away from her, even in the midst of her pleasure.

Several days passed. Betty was listless. She would sit for minutes staring out of the window with a tiny worry-pucker between her eyes. The Princess was troubled about her but could not seem to get to the heart of the difficulty; for Betty shared her fears with no one.

The children came to the Castle every day. Usually they amused themselves in the barn, gardens, or yard, but one part of the day was set aside for the Princess and stories. Then the little girls sewed or made things with their hands while the boys cut out wonderful articles of wood with the knives and jig-saws which had

been presented by the doctor. Sometimes he would run over to help them and would stay to talk with the Princess. This was the time of day that the Princess and the children got together to talk things over.

One day she was a little bit late in coming. Betty informed the others that she had a surprise for them, but what it was, even she had no idea.

"It's a happy one," she told them, "for her eyes were all smily."

"Maybe it's something to eat," suggested Tubby, licking his lips as if he considered that would be the happiest kind of a surprise as far as he was concerned.

Reddy's lip curled. "Eat, eat, eat all the time! All you think about is stuffing yourself like a Thanksgiving goose."

Tubby tackled Reddy, and together they rolled over and over on the lawn. The scrimmage was all in fun, though, and soon they stopped, abashed at the sight of the Princess at the front door.

In her hand was an open letter, and joy was in her face. Soon all were comfortably settled, waiting for they knew not what pleasure. Something unexpected was about to happen; that they could all see.

“Do you remember the story I told you: ‘The Coming of the King’?” she asked.

They nodded. It had been a pretty story, but what bearing that could have upon the Princess’s surprise they couldn’t imagine.

“The King is coming here,” announced the Princess solemnly.

Myrtle sprang upon her with delight. “Truly?” she demanded. “The very same king that used to play with the two little princesses? Is it the same one that was so sorry that he was mean to the second princess?”

“Yes,” replied the Princess with a smile, “my grandfather is coming this very week. I do not know just when, for he wanted

that to be a surprise. Would you like to hear me read his letter?"

"Yes," they chorused.

The Princess unfolded the letter, and read:

"Magnolia Terrace,
"Florida.

"MY DEAR VIRGINIA:

"I am breaking the old oath, dear, for I am coming back to the old house that I vowed never again to enter. A bad promise it was, better broken than kept.

"I am planning to come this week, although as yet I have not decided upon the day. I can hardly wait to see the results of our enterprise. Perhaps the pleasure of doing for your little friends will diminish the old sorrow of not being able to locate the little lost Anne. While I am there I will try again to find my little girl.

"Give my love to all the dear children and tell them to leave a warm spot in their hearts for the 'King of the Brown Castle.'

"Always your loving,
"GRANDFATHER."

The Princess's grandfather was coming! Why, it seemed as if some favorite fairy tale were springing to life, and that somehow they were all parts of it. There was much to be done. It would never do for the King to find weeds in the garden or dust in the playhouse. Without an exception, all the children pitched in to work.

It was wonderful for Betty to be able to be with them again. She worked as hard as the Princess would allow, and enjoyed every minute of it, but all the time in contrast with the present joy was the foreboding of the separation that was to come.

In imagination Betty could see herself taking a tearful farewell of her dear Princess and Myrtle. She had thought about it so much that it seemed very real. The separation, the lonely trip to the asylum, the difficulty of getting acquainted with new people, and the terrible alone feeling! Betty was naturally timid, and she hated all prospect of change.

To hide the tears that she felt welling up in her eyes, she caught up Marjorie and hid her hot, unhappy face in the pink rompers. Marjorie sensing trouble in a mysterious baby fashion threw chubby arms about Betty's neck and covered her face with loving kisses, if a trifle moist.

During the next two or three days Betty was sad at intervals, and the Doctor shook his head over her.

"Something is the matter with her," he told the Princess. "She isn't gaining as fast as she should, and I'd be willing to guarantee that she is not eating as much as she should."

The Princess shook her head.

"Well," went on the doctor, "we might try to find out what is the trouble."

"I have tried to find out," protested the Princess, "but she just shakes her head to let me know that there is nothing the matter which she can tell about. Wild horses couldn't drag it from her. I had no idea

the child was so resolute. She looks perfectly miserable, but she won't say a word."

"It runs in the family," replied the doctor. "I just tackled the grandmother again this morning in a vain hope of finding out whether or not there were relatives, but I might just as well have been questioning the Sphinx itself. At best she has only a week or so to live, and I am getting to doubt whether we shall get her to speak. Let me try with Betty, though. We are pretty good friends. Perhaps she will tell me."

Betty was called in from the garden where she had been reading. She smiled when she saw the visitor, for during her convalescence they had become very good friends. To her, he was a magician who chased away all the pain and ugly dreams of her sickness.

"I have been hearing sad tales of you, Betty-girl," he began gravely.

Betty looked at him in surprise. She did not remember 'doing anything particularly naughty. He looked very grave and Betty was troubled. She slipped an affectionate arm about his neck.

"I didn't know that I had done anything bad," she said. "What was it?"

He drew her down on his knee and looked at her.

"You are making your Princess very unhappy," he said quietly. "She knows that there is something that is bothering you and making you feel bad and it disturbs her. Can't you tell me what is the trouble?"

The ready tears sprang into Betty's eyes and one rolled down her cheek and splashed on the doctor's hand, but she shook her head.

"Won't you tell me?" persisted the doctor holding her fast, for she wanted to slip away from him.

However, no coaxing, insisting, or dis-

pleasure would move her. It seemed strange that so sensitive and timid a girl could keep her secret to herself.

It does seem strange that no one guessed that Betty was worried about the Old Ladies' Home and the Orphan Asylum, but they did not realize that since her mother's death Betty had been prepared for the time when she would be given over to the city. From stories she had read, she had gained the idea that that was the worst thing which could happen to a little girl. How was she to know that the city was her best friend?

The days were now bitter-sweet to Betty. Every day she woke up expecting to be sent away, and every night she dreaded it for the coming day. She was surprised that her time of comfort and loving attention had lasted as long as it had.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE COMING OF THE KING

THE house was put in order from cellar to garret in honor of the King. Every room was arranged as nearly as possible as it had been years ago when the house was the beloved Castle of its returning master.

How different it was from the neglected Castle of only a very few months ago! The air of gloom which always pervades an empty house was entirely gone. Crisp white curtains fluttered at open windows. Smoke came from the chimney. The rose-bush was carefully trained to run where it would be most beautiful, and the garden, formerly a waste of weeds and briars, presented a flourishing promise of goodies and beauty to come.

Betty was in the garden industriously searching for a many-legged worm that was playing havoc with aster plants that were her pride and joy. During her sickness, Myrtle had taken care of the garden, and since then both little girls had entered into a partnership whereby Myrtle would benefit by Betty's vegetables and Betty would share the flowers of Myrtle. So although the aster plants really belonged to Myrtle, Betty was on her hands and knees looking for the naughty worm.

Although she was not naturally vicious, her intentions toward the unsuspecting worm were as baleful as might be imagined.

“Fee, fi, fo, fum,
I see the trail of a wire-worm,
Be he alive or be he dead,
I'll smash his back and break his head.”

That is what she was, a giant searching out her victims. She found several. So

intent was Betty that she did not see a pair of keen blue eyes looking at her closely. She did not see the tall, rather dignified old man on the other side of the fence.

Neither did she see Marjorie Jones who was approaching from the house armed with a very small watering-pot. The first she knew of her presence was when a gentle rain-storm broke suddenly over her head.

"You little mischief!" she exclaimed, jumping up quickly, "just see what you have done on my clean dress and my hair!"

Marjorie gurgled with joy and again brandished the watering-pot. Betty, after shaking the water from her hair, tried to get the watering-pot away from the chubby fingers that held it so tightly, but Marjorie had other ideas. She clung to it with all her baby strength and Betty wisely gave up trying to get it away from her.

"See," she exclaimed, "see, Marjorie,

how very dry the poor flowers are. I just know that they are thirsty. Let's play that they are babies and that you are feeding them from a silver cup."

"Mik?" questioned the baby.

"Yes," responded Betty, "real milk from a silver cup."

"From a silly cup," prattled Marjorie and with much baby talk of, "Pitty flous, kirskey. Marjie give um mik," the water that remained in the pot was sprinkled over the asters, the lawn, Reddy's potatoes, and whatever else caught her attention, including the gray kitten and the puppy, which 'did not in the least appreciate the favor.

That being accomplished and as many worms disposed of as were to be found, Marjorie was ready for entertainment.

"Tell a tory," she begged, pulling at Betty's dress. "Tell a tory."

Betty pulled her down beside her and rolled her over and over. "You don't

want a story. What you want is a spanking."

Marjorie gave Betty several soft little slaps, which she considered severe punishment.

"Me spank," she said, "you tell a tory."

"Well, once upon a time there lived a little girl in a horrid place," began the story-teller. "She was very unhappy and she often cried and cried."

"Kied and kied," replied Marjorie while the old gentleman on the other side of the fence drew nearer in order to hear every word, although he took good care to keep out of sight behind the clump of lilacs.

"Yes, she cried because she didn't have any one to love her except a little sick grandmother who said that some time the little girl would have to go to the orphan asylum.

"One day the little girl was sick and a dear good fairy took her away to fairy-land. The fairy was so good to her. In-

stead of old rags she was dressed in rose-petals, and she had the nicest things to eat and play with."

"Eat?" asked Marjorie. "Mik?"

"Bread and milk and oranges, too," replied Betty, naming the things that Marjorie particularly liked. "There were birds outside the windows and flowers everywhere. The fairy was so good. She told the little girl stories and kissed her when she was in bed, and the little girl was so happy that for a long time she forgot all about the orphan asylum, but by and by she began to remember. She knew that she must soon leave fairy-land and go back to the horrid place or the asylum, and she was sad."

Marjorie had not understood three words of the story, but the tall man behind the clump of lilac-bushes did understand. This child must be the little Betty of the Princess's letter, and fear of the orphan asylum was what was troubling her. You



“SHE DIDN’T HAVE ANYONE TO LOVE EXCEPT A LITTLE SICK
GRANDMOTHER.”—*Page 189.*

see, the King had quietly come back to his kingdom, and, like the kings of the old fairy tales, going about in disguise had discovered what was troubling the heart of one of his little subjects. He smiled softly as he strode up the walk to the Castle entrance.

The Princess was sewing by an open window. Glancing up, she saw the tall man and hastily jumped up. Down on the floor dropped her work, unheeded. The spool of thread rolled off under the what-not, but the Princess paid no attention to it. In a flash she was out on the piazza and in another moment was in her grandfather's arms.

Betty and Marjorie hearing her joyful exclamation hurried from the garden. It was like going to meet some famous character out of a book. The arrival of Ali Baba or the Old Man of the Sea himself could not have awed Betty more. And yet he was not such a fearsome personage,

either. Soon she felt quite at ease with him.

That evening as they all sat together on the front piazza Betty tried to put into words her feelings toward him. She was seated on the arm of his chair and his arm was about her.

"I was awfully afraid of you, just at first," she exclaimed. "It seemed as if you must be like one of the magicians of Aladdin's lamp that could work all sorts of magic."

"Not all," he said a trifle sadly, as he thought of the little Lost Princess Anne. Then he thought of the story that he had heard Betty tell in the garden, and a sudden idea almost popped into his head.

"No," he said gravely, "I am a rather poor magician, but like many other kings I do possess some power. Now, for example, when it comes to making wishes come true, I am a regular wizard. Wouldn't you like to try out my power?"

“How?” breathed Betty wistfully.

“Well,” replied the King, “you know how to write letters, don’t you?”

Betty nodded. “I am in the second part of the fourth grade,” she answered, “and we often write letters in school.”

“That will do excellently,” said the King rubbing a smile off his face with the back of his hand. “Now, have you any writing-paper?”

“There is some pink paper in my desk,” put in the Princess. “It used to belong to the second princess.”

While Betty was looking for the stationery the King told the Princess what he had heard in the garden.

“Now that we know what is troubling her, we shall know what to do to make her happy,” said the Princess.

“Don’t say anything about it to-night,” warned the King. “I want to work my fairy-tale scheme.”

The Princess smiled and kissed him,

"You old fairy humbug," she said playfully.

"You wait, young lady, and see if I am a humbug," was his reply. "But," he continued, "I think we had better go in, for it is too dark for the child to write here."

Betty had not been able to find the paper, but as the Princess knew just where to lay her hand upon it, Betty was soon ready to write.

"Now," said the King impressively, "you are going to write a letter to the King of the Brown Castle telling exactly what you want most of anything. When the letter is finished, seal it with sealing-wax so that no one can open it without your knowing, and place it on the corner of the mantelpiece. It will remain there unopened by me or any one else. Within the year your wish will come true."

Betty looked up at him with wondering eyes. Surely there were no such things

as fairies and magicians, however much one might pretend, and yet the King had actually promised her that she would get her wish and he didn't seem to be making fun, either. If he really could make wishes come true—well, anything was worth trying. She drew the paper to her and began to write.

Writing letters to kings was a serious matter, and it took several trials on yellow paper before she was satisfied with the result. One word had to be looked up in the dictionary. She did not care to ask the Princess or the King how to spell "asylum." Looking up words in the dictionary was a difficult matter, too. It was a thing they had learned in school just before vacation. Just as she was about to seal the letter she thought of something else.

"May I ask for two things?" she asked.

The King looked at her from over the top of his newspaper. "I can't really

promise more than one, but put it down as a sort of postscript. I'll do what I can about it," he replied.

After putting down the second wish, Betty read the whole letter through to see whether it was free from mistakes. This is what she had written:

"The Brown Castle,
"July 14.

"DEAR KING,

"You said that I could wish for anything I wanted. There is just one thing that is bothering me. I don't want to go to the orphans' asylum. Please keep me from going. I'd like to stay here forever but that is too much to ask. I'll love you always if you do that for me.

"Your loving friend,
"ELIZABETH ANNE BROWN.

"P. S. If you can't make and get the things that you want for yourself and can make too of my wishes come true my second wish is that you find the lost princess."

When she had read it through and had

approved it, she ran her little pink tongue along the glue on the envelope flap. The Princess showed her how to drop the melted pink wax on the flap, and let her use her engraved ring to make a pretty little pattern on the wax. After that Betty went upstairs to bed.

It couldn't have been more than ten minutes after that, for Betty had taken only one shoe off, when the bell rang. A minute later she heard the doctor's voice in the hall. With one shoe in her hand she limped to the top of the stairs, intending to call down to him, but before she had a chance to speak, his voice came up to her clearly.

"She is dead," Betty heard him say. "I think she was trying to tell me something about Betty, but none of us could make out what it was."

"Poor Betty!" sighed the Princess. "It will be an awful shock to her. We won't tell her just yet. I have been planning to

take her away as soon as my Grandfather came, for I knew I could safely leave the Castle in his hands."

Betty heard no more. The worst had happened. Her grandmother was gone, and there was no one who wanted Betty. Even the Princess was planning this moment to take her away.

Hot tears came into her eyes as she slipped into her little white nightgown. She knelt down by the window to say her prayers as her mother had taught her. The stars seemed very near and beautiful. Somehow she did not feel quite so bad as she did before. Somewhere above those stars were Mother and Grandmother. As she crept into bed, she remembered the King's promise and fell asleep with a smile on her face.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MORE MAGIC

WHEN Betty awoke the next morning nothing was said of her grandmother's death or about any plans for leaving the Brown Castle. The morning was much as usual. It was true that the Princess seemed hurried and spent quite a long time in the King's library talking in low tones with the door shut, but they often 'did that. Soon afterward the Princess called Betty. Evidently it was coming, the much-dreaded separation.

Looking perfectly miserable, Betty slowly entered the room. The Princess had on a dark-colored dress and wore a hat. A hand-bag lay on one of the tapestry chairs. That meant that she was go-

ing somewhere. Betty's own hat was there, too. That meant that Betty was going. Was the Princess going to take her away without giving her a chance to say "Good-by," to the other children? Wouldn't she ever see Myrtle again? In silent dismay she looked at the Princess.

"I am going down-town, Betty," smiled the Princess, "and I thought that you would like to go with me. Wash your hands and face as quickly as possible, for Grandfather is waiting to take us in the auto."

With a much lighter heart Betty skipped away to do as she had been told. Perhaps, after all, it was not going to happen to-day. Betty knew that the Princess would not take her away for good without giving her a chance to gather together her belongings. She drew a sigh of relief.

As the big car purred and rolled off toward down-town, Betty settled back and folded her hands contentedly. There was

a smile on her face and her fears were for the moment forgotten.

It really was a wonderful morning. They went to several big stores and shopped. Betty had been to some of the stores before, but never had she seen such buying as the Princess indulged in. It seemed as if she had a bottomless pocket-book.

Betty loved the pretty things that she saw. Laces, ribbon, toys, and books, they looked at. Then they bought things. Pretty gingham, blue, pink, green, and brown was piled up for their choice. The Princess let Betty choose. There was no doubt but that the blue was the prettiest. It was just the color of the forget-me-nots on the wall of Betty's room. It would look very well on the Princess, too.

And yet the pink was lovely, as well. It looked like the rosy little clouds at sunset. And the green! Who could resist that cool lettuce color? Betty, remembering

the days of her sickness and the terrible burning-up feeling, laid her cheek against the lovely stuff.

The Princess smiled as she gave an order to the clerk. She also smiled as the clerk measured off three yards of blue, three yards of pink, and three yards of green. Betty was worried. She plucked at the sleeve of the Princess.

"Three yards is an awfully little lot," she whispered. "Can you make a dress out of so small a piece?"

"I am sure it will answer my purpose," replied the Princess after she had given the address of the Brown Castle to the clerk.

Silks came next. They looked like the belongings of fairies. Some of the silk was filmy and airy. It fluttered at the least movement of air. Some was rich and heavy-looking. The colors were mixed. It looked as though it might have belonged to some Eastern prince or magician.

Betty wandered from one roll of silk to

another like a drab little moth among the roses, lilies, and daffodils of a beautiful garden. "It is a fairy store," she said, running an exploring finger over a wonderful piece of turquoise blue.

"If you might have a silk dress, Betty, which of these would you choose?" asked the Princess. Betty pondered, with her head a little to one side.

"I think I'd like a white one," she finally answered. "I haven't had a white dress since I came to the city to live. Grandmother always picked out my dresses, and she always bought dark-colored things that would not show dirt. Besides, in my dream my mother had on a white dress, and it was all misty like this." She laid her hand on a delicate roll of crêpe de Chine.

"You shall have your white dress, dear," replied the Princess. "Aunt Sally will cut it out and fit it for you."

Betty gave a little skip of surprise and

pleasure. Forgetting that she was in a store or that people might be looking, she threw both arms about the Princess and hugged her.

The rest of the morning was a whirl of delight. New shoes, new hat, and a new coat were ordered and sent to the Brown Castle. Dainty underthings were also bought. The little nightgowns were lace-trimmed and had pretty ribbon at the neck. They were much too small for the Princess. Betty's eyes shone like twin stars.

The shopping was not finished by noon. The Princess went to a big restaurant and ordered all manner of good things to eat. It was the first restaurant Betty had ever gone to, and it was a thrilling experience. It was a very tired little girl who came home to the Brown Castle that night.

The last purchase of all had frightened her badly. It was a trim little steamer-trunk with her initials in big block letters on one end. A trunk meant traveling,

and traveling meant going away from the Princess and Myrtle. Although her fear of the orphan asylum was nearly gone because of the King's promise, still, she knew there was coming a time when she must leave.

That evening the Princess told her. They were sitting in their favorite place on the piazza and the Princess's arm was about Betty's waist. The story was gently told. The Princess made Betty see how much happier Grandmother was now.

Betty listened in silence, although tears ran down her face.

"And about you, dear," she went on and Betty held her breath. "Do you remember whether Mother or Grandmother ever mentioned any relatives to you?"

Betty wrinkled up her forehead in doubt. Somewhere, far back in her memory, was a faint recollection of a tall man with a smile who used to tell her stories and sing to her. How he could sing!

That was Daddy. But Daddy was gone, too.

Mother and Grandmother had not talked much about relatives. It seemed as if there must be some, somewhere. Mother used to talk about a lovely garden where she and another little girl played with their dolls, but it was all confused. Strange to say, the story of the "Land of Heart's Delight" was mixed up with her mother's story. It was impossible to tell where truth left off and fairy tale began. It was most puzzling.

Betty could not tell all this to the Princess. It was so mixed. She was sure of nothing, so she merely shook her head. There was some letters somewhere that had been packed away in a little trunk that had belonged once to her mother's mother. It was a small brown trunk.

"Where is that trunk?" asked the Princess.

Betty shook her head. It seemed as if

it were stored somewhere, although she did not know whether it was in the city or in the town they had lived in before. She thought, however, that she remembered seeing her mother fold and put away a certain yellow-and-white rosebud dress that Betty had outgrown but was very fond of. She had worn that dress the first Sunday after she came away, so it must be stored in the city.

“Where did you live before you came here?” questioned the Princess.

“I can’t remember much about it,” replied Betty. “I was a little girl then, not quite six years old.”

“Tell me about your old home,” urged the Princess.

Betty’s eyes grew misty again. It was only a faint memory but a very sweet one. In the first place Mother had been happy and Daddy was there. They had lived with Uncle Peter in a little white cottage with pink roses growing over the door.

Sometimes Mother wore the roses in her hair. There had been a big dog. She could not remember his name, but she had loved him dearly.

The Princess listened with interest, but there was nothing in Betty's story that gave any real clue to the mystery.

"Where is Uncle Peter now?" she asked.

"He died, Princess," responded the child, with a little quiver in her voice. "He lost lots of money and died. Then Mother and Grandmother came to the city to live. Mother went away and now Grandmother. They are all gone."

It was an incomplete story. Some of the links were gone completely and some were broken. Betty did not know her father's first name. She did not know whether Uncle Peter was her father's brother or her mother's brother. There were hundreds of people in the United States named Brown. Brown? Browne?

There was not much difference except in the spelling. If only the Little Lost Anne could be found. Perhaps Betty had relatives who did not know her whereabouts. Perhaps they longed to find her.

Betty was a child that any one might be proud to claim. Refined, dainty, and lovable, she had won a large place for herself in the Princess's heart. Virginia made up her mind that if no relatives could be found, she herself would take care of Betty, but she did not tell the child so, for fear that her hope might be shattered.

She comforted the little girl as best she could, telling her not to worry, for she was sure that things would turn out in some happy way. That evening she told the King all that Betty had told her, confident that he would have some plan to suggest.

"It is strange," he told her seriously, "that I who am searching for a little girl should be also called upon to help find the relatives of another little child who has

been separated from them. It seems almost as if it were a task laid upon me from Above. I am glad that I have a chance to right some wrong that is other than my own."

The Princess put both arms about him. "Then you will do all you can for Betty," she said softly. "I knew you would."

"I will do all that is in a man's power," he promised, "and at the same time I will begin the search again for my own little Anne. Somehow, I can't explain just how, I feel as if I were going to succeed in both tasks. To-morrow I will begin, and I will not give up again until I succeed."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE SURPRISE

A GREAT many things happened the following week. Aunt Sally was very busy in the sewing-room. There was the sound of the shears and the whirr of the sewing-machine. The bundles of blue and pink and brown gingham were transformed from mere pieces of cloth into charming little dresses, crisp and fresh, trimmed with organdy and narrow lace edges. Aunt Sally, too, was a fairy magician in her way.

The dresses were much too small for the Princess. They were fitted on Betty. Could they be for her? It seemed too good to be true.

There were the dainty little underthings, too. It seemed as if there was everything

that a little girl could possibly need. They were all carefully folded and put away in the little trunk that was placed in Betty's room. Betty hated that trunk. It said as plainly as a trunk could say, "You are not going to stay. I am going to take you away with me."

Myrtle rejoiced at her friend's good fortune, but her face changed when she saw the trunk and heard Betty's fears concerning it. She threw both arms about Betty and held her very close.

"I am going to ask the Princess this very moment," she declared stoutly. "I don't believe she is going to send you away now for good, anyhow."

"Don't do that," begged Betty catching her friend by the arm. "The Princess doesn't know. She is trying to find out whether I have any aunts or uncles or other relatives."

One morning shortly after this, the Princess paid a visit to Mrs. O'Toole. All the

children were sent out, which gave an air of mystery to the visit. The Princess came away with a smile and a bundle. Mrs. O'Toole was smiling broadly when the children returned, but not one word would she say about the Princess's visit except, "Wait and see." It was most perplexing. Myrtle racked her brains in vain for a possible explanation.

What was in the bundle? Why was it going to the Princess? Why wouldn't her mother tell? Perhaps Betty could throw some light on the subject. It was hard to wait until morning, and even when morning did come, there was quite a bit to do before she was allowed to play.

When nine o'clock finally did come, more mysterious things happened. Myrtle was instructed to wear her best hat and to carry a coat. She couldn't understand it at all, for the day was very warm and the best hat was considered very choice. It was white straw trimmed with pink roses

and satin ribbon, obviously not a hat in which to play. Myrtle was mystified.

She was given another bundle to carry to the Princess. What could her mother be sending? She could tell nothing from the shape of the bundle. It was oblong, and of the same size as the bundle that the Princess took away with her the night before. It was puzzling. Her mother kissed her several times before she went and held her very close for several moments. One might almost think that Mother hated to have her go.

To add to her surprise, the Princess accepted the bundle as if she were expecting it. She told Myrtle to lay her coat and hat out on the bed in her room. There was a broad smile on her face. Was she laughing at Myrtle's bewildered look?

Both Betty and Myrtle were bidden to go out and play in the garden. They went slowly, and discussed the matter at length. Betty was as puzzled as her friend. She

could not throw any light upon the subject.

In the house there were also signs that all was not as it usually was. Aunt Sally was bustling around in the kitchen, putting up a lunch of most generous proportions. Aunt Sally was a genius at putting up lunches. She took much pride in her accomplishment.

"Some folks," she was wont to say, "can act so well in de movies 'dat it makes one's eyes water jes' to look at 'em, but as for me I likes to make deir mouths water."

Surely the little triangular sandwiches done up so attractively in oiled paper, the lemonade which already was in the thermos bottle, the great fragrant peaches, and the chocolate cake, not to mention olives and candy, were enough to make any one's mouth water. Betty and Myrtle, observing from the window, beamed with approval. Evidently it was going to be a picnic.

Aunt Sally beamed broadly at all ques-

tions, but refused absolutely to answer any of them. However, as she passed out the ends cut from the loaf of chocolate cake, they felt satisfied with their raid.

The whole thing was very upsetting, however, especially when Marjorie arrived with Dick, dressed in her next-to-best dress and also accompanied by a bundle. Myrtle immediately besieged Dick with questions, but he merely screwed up his face and winked at her. His lips seemed glued, but his eyes twinkled. Myrtle was at the point of bursting with curiosity.

It was after ten when the express-wagon drew up at the door. One big trunk was carried out of the Brown Castle. It took two men to carry it. As soon as it was lifted into the truck, one of the men went back into the house. He soon returned bearing on his back Betty's small trunk. There were her initials on one end.

In sudden fear her eyes sought those of

the Princess, who was standing on the piazza. A quick smile reassured her. Evidently they were going somewhere, but not for good, or the Princess would not look so happy about it. It might be almost anything that was pleasant.

It was impossible to wait another moment, however. They caught the Princess and laughingly drew her to the big rocking-chair. Myrtle anchored her down by sitting in her lap. Betty perched upon the arm of the chair, and even Marjorie, feeling that something was called for, dragged impatiently at her skirts. The time had come to divulge the secret.

It sounded like a story. The Princess told about a pretty little cottage down by the sea where the waves lapped up against the yellow sand in a little harbor, and farther out slapped up briskly against huge rocks. It was a pleasant place where the wind blew roses into people's cheeks and appetites grew amazingly.

For two weeks they, the Princess, Marjorie, Myrtle, and Betty were to stay at the cottage. The King with the help of Aunt Sally was to stay at the Castle. While they were gone, the King meant to locate Betty's trunk if he had to visit every place in the city where people stored things they were not using.

The bundles that came from Myrtle's house and the one Dick brought contained the clothing they would need during their vacation.

Neither Myrtle nor Betty had ever seen the sea, although both little girls had read fascinating books of sea-monsters, pirates, and mermaids. Fortunately for their peace of mind they did not have to wait much longer, for the King was ready to drive them down to the station almost immediately. Betty had barely time to slip into the darkest of the new gingham dresses. It was laid out ready for her on the bed.

Neither girls had had much experience with riding on the train. Myrtle had never ridden that way before and Betty only once. It was when they had moved from the country.

"I used to be terribly afraid of trains," she confided to Myrtle. "I thought they were monsters like dragons with fiery eyes that breathed out smoke and fire."

In spite of the heat, both girls enjoyed every minute of the ride. It seemed so queer to see the trees and houses slip by so quickly.

"It's just as if we sat still and all the ground ran away under us," Myrtle told Betty.

"Look, Betty!" she cried, "real water-lilies on the pond. I never saw any except one that Mrs. Pierce brought home with her the time she went to visit her daughter in the country. It had a gold center that looked like a tiny gold crown."

Before she had finished speaking the

pond had disappeared in the distance and a pretty bit of woodland had taken its place. It was like turning over the leaves of a huge picture-book with new scenes on every page.

Marjorie did not care for scenery, but she was good and happy. A new doll bought for the occasion absorbed every moment of her time. Much to the amusement of the rest of the travelers, she sang it to sleep. The motion of the train made her sleepy, too, and it wasn't long before she also was sound asleep with her head pillowed upon the new doll.

Lunch created a happy diversion, and soon after that the train drew in at the station. Such a bustle! Every one seemed to be in such a hurry. Before the train had fairly stopped, the aisles were crowded with people anxious to be off. And then the confusion on the platform! Every one in a hurry! Small trucks perilously loaded and provided with motor attach-

ments threaded their way through the hurrying throngs of people.

Every now and then came the grinding of machinery and the terrifying blasts of escaping steam that made Betty clasp the hand of the Princess in fear. A colored porter helped them to gather together their bags and bundles and did not leave them until they were safely out of the station and in a waiting taxicab.

It did not take long to get to the wharf. Here again were bustling crowds of people, each trying to outdo the other in speed and noise. They had to stand in line with other people waiting for tickets. There was much to see.

The walk over the gang-plank was exciting. Betty shuddered as she looked at the dark green water below. The gang-plank was so frail and so many people were crossing at once. What if it should break and all the people should go tumbling into the sea! It was a dreadful

thought. She wondered how many could swim.

She whispered her thought to Myrtle. That young lady giggled.

“Wouldn’t they look funny when they were fished out?” she replied. “Look at the lady with the lots and lots of feathers in her hat. I can see that hat after it was ducked, can’t you?”

Just as Betty looked up, a playful little wind sprang up from somewhere. The billowy hat topped with ribbon and feathers caught the wind as a sail, and off it went. The lady shrieked and made a frantic attempt to regain it, but in vain.

After a few dizzy swirls it struck the water, fortunately landing right side up. There, far below, it floated, with its ribbons and feathers still bobbing cheerfully. There was more excitement. Some big boys on the wharf tried to get it by slipping the end of a long pole through a loop of the ribbon. At last after several vain

attempts it was returned, still flaunting its plumes, but rather the worse for wear and tear.

The ride was delightful. The wind whipped the children's faces until they glowed pink. A wide trail of creamy, churned-up water stretched out behind them, as the ship steamed out of the harbor.

There were many smaller craft in the harbor also. Small sailboats skimmed over the water. Now and then a larger sailing-vessel with sails spread out like wings came into view.

Wherever they looked, new wonders came into sight. They had not imagined that there could be so much water in the world. Not once were they out of sight of land. Once their boat passed another which was coming into the harbor. Every one cheered and waved.

The voyage was all too short. Long before any one was ready for the trip to

come to an end, the Princess told them that they were nearly there and pointed out a distant point of land.

“The pier where we get off is there,” she told them. “Then will come a short ride to the cottage.”

“It’s been a lovely trip,” sighed Betty, “and I have enjoyed every minute of it, but really, do you know, I’ll be glad to get somewhere where I can go to sleep.”

“It’s because you have swallowed so much fresh air,” replied Myrtle sagely. “My mother says that we are all sleepy after we have been out for a long time in the air. This is the freshest wind I ever felt.”

“I guess that’s what the lady thought when her hat blew off,” laughed Betty. “I was sorry for her, though, for it was a pretty hat.”

The land became nearer. Instead of being merely a blur on the horizon, as it seemed at first, there were houses and a

big pier. It seemed as if the entire population was on that pier. They cheered as the boat drew near and waved at the people on board. Every one seemed to have friends on board.

Pretty ladies came down to meet their husbands who were returning from work in the city. Little girls and boys swarmed out to meet their fathers. They were waving handkerchiefs and throwing kisses.

After a delay that seemed to last forever, the big ropes were thrown ashore to the men who were waiting to make fast the boat. The engines stopped throbbing. Again there was a stream of people crossing the gang-plank. The hubbub on the wharf increased. Automobiles whirled away. The Princess waited only long enough to see about baggage and then they, too, were on their way to the cottage by the sea.

The sun was setting like a molten ball of

gold in the west. It turned the clouds to gold and rose-color. It was beautiful, but the girls were too tired to appreciate it. The only thing that really interested them was the light lunch and then bed.

“How still it is,” murmured Myrtle as the Princess took away the light.

“Just the sound of the waves lapping up on the shore,” replied Betty. “It sounds like a lullaby, just as the Princess said. Good night.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SEA WONDERS

A SAUCY sunbeam playing upon the faces of the sleepers woke Myrtle bright and early the next morning. She skipped out of bed and sped to the window facing the open sea.

A glorious expanse of tossing blue water as far as she could see met her view. Against the grim granite rocks of the shore the waves threw themselves, only to break into a million sparkling jewels of foam and spray. Far out upon the sea a white-winged boat danced upon the waves.

It was too lovely to keep to herself, so she tiptoed over to Betty's cot. It did not take long for Betty to rub the sleep out of her eyes, and very soon two little white-

gowned figures knelt at the open window taking their first glimpse of their new surroundings.

“Look at that lovely big rock,” whispered Betty, “the one with the spray dashing against it. Do you suppose that it is a mermaid throne where a sea-maiden sits and combs her golden locks?”

“Sea-green locks you mean,” answered Myrtle. “They always have green hair and eyes, you know. It looks like an enchanted palace surrounded by an impassable sea.”

“It is the home of the wicked Hydrada,” Betty went on in a spooky tone. “On the left you can see the bottomless pit where she drowns her victims, and on the right is the dragon’s caldron.”

“Yes,” continued Myrtle, “you can see the water bubbling up. I’d hate to be in Hydrada’s grip.”

“Let us see what new wonders are in this fairy realm,” suggested Betty. They

went to the other window, a large one overlooking a little bay. In this the waters were calm and quiet, for huge rocks and a man-made causeway shut off the heavy waves and the fury of the open sea.

It was almost high tide now, so the water was trickling over the causeway. On nearly all sides there were huge rocks, but on the side nearest the house a beautiful sandy beach sloped gently to the edge of the sea. The trees and grass came nearly down to the water. It was very pretty, and promised to furnish a wonderful place to play.

Their rapture over this pleasing prospect was too great to be kept in a whisper, and in a few minutes the Princess entered the room, dressed in the pale-blue silk wrapper that had excited Myrtle's admiration the second time she had seen her. Her hair fell in a golden shower over her shoulders.

She smiled as she saw the little night-

gowned figures at the window. Her right hand she held behind her, and there was in her eyes the hint of mystery that the girls loved.

As soon as she appeared they started towards her, but she held up her left hand and bade them shut their eyes. With eyes screwed up tight and wide smiles on their faces they faced her.

“Shall we open our mouths, too?” asked Myrtle mischievously, and Betty laughing quoted the old saying:

“Open your mouth and shut your eyes;
I’ll give you something to make you wise.”

“No, you rascals,” replied the Princess. “You are not little goats, and what I have is not digestible. Hold out your arms.”

As she spoke she laid in each little girl’s arms a brown bundle, which upon being unrolled disclosed a complete set of khaki middy and bloomers. Beside that there were tan stockings and non-slip, rubber-

soled shoes. There was even a khaki-colored band for the hair. Both little girls shrieked with delight. It did not take them very long to get 'dressed in the new suits. There was a scramble at the end.

"I won," announced Myrtle proudly.

"Oh, no, you didn't," retorted Betty, "for your band is upside down and your hair is all in a muss. Come here and let me fix it."

Breakfast was ready immediately, and a delicious breakfast it was. Muffins, corn-flakes with rich cream, and fresh fruit made a breakfast fit for a princess, as Betty said, with a loving glance at her Princess.

Delicious as the breakfast was, the little girls could hardly wait, so eager they were to get on the beach. A small path led them to the little bay.

"We'll save old Hydrada until later," said Betty, "for I had much rather explore this cunning little bay."

“Let’s pretend that we are pirates and have just landed in this harbor,” said Myrtle. “I am Big Chief Walk-the-Plank. I have one hundred fifty pounds of gold which I am going to bury at sunset beneath some scarred oak-tree. Woe betide any one who observes me, for I will slaughter him in cold blood and hang him up to a sour apple-tree.”

“My, but you are fierce!” scoffed Betty. “What’ll I be?”

“You can be Red Dirk, the bloody terror of the Spanish Main. We’ll be partners and——”

She broke off quickly with a gasp of delight as they turned a corner and saw below them the little bay. Shoes and stockings were off in a twinkling, and in a very few minutes twenty pink toes were wriggling in the warm water of one of the tide-pools.

There was much to see and to marvel at. When the Princess came down the path an

hour later they had many treasures to show her and about a million questions, more or less, to ask.

“Not both at the same time,” she cried laughingly. “What is that that you have, Myrtle?”

Myrtle displayed several shells with little live things in them. The Princess took one gently in her hand and held it out for their inspection.

“Once upon a time,” she began, “a different kind of a little animal lived in this shell. His name was Periwinkle. He used to walk along the bottom of the sea waving his two little horns in the water and eating smaller animals that met his hungry little mouth.

“Then it came his turn to be eaten, and the pretty shell was tossed about upon the floor surface of the sea without any little creature within its sheltering walls.

“Now it happened that one little sea animal was not so well protected as the

others. Part of him, indeed, was armor-clad and further protected by hard, pinching claws, but the rest of him was weak and soft. All the other little animals of the sea wanted to eat him, and made his life miserable by chasing him from cover to cover.

“One day things were especially bad. Little Crab had been chased from one bunch of seaweed to another only nearly to fall into the clutches of a fierce sea-robber. Poor Crab; hastily he backed out with the robber close behind. There was no place to hide. The robber was nearly up to him. One snap of his horrid claws——

“Just a little way off lay the cast-off shell of Periwinkle. It was too small to protect all of little Crab, but quick as a wink he turned around backwards and wriggled his soft little body deep into the shell.

“The sea-robber came up sure of getting a nice plump breakfast. But what a sur-

prise met him. A snapping pair of little scissors met him, and everywhere there was hard shell. After trying vainly to get at Crab, he went away very much disgusted and quite hungry to search for breakfast elsewhere.

“Meanwhile Crab looked out of his retreat wistfully. Oh, if he could always remain so well protected! Reluctantly he advanced a few steps. To his surprise the shell went along with him easily. He had solved the problem. From that day to this hermit crabs wear the cast-off shells of their neighbors, the periwinkles.”

“Wasn’t he the cleverest thing, to think of that all by himself?” said Myrtle admiringly.

“Does he ever come out of his shell after he has found one?” asked Betty.

“Yes,” replied the Princess. “You see some are big and some are small, and the big ones are in big shells and the small ones are in small shells. When they grow up,

they change their shells for larger ones.”

After very careful pulling and twisting, Myrtle managed to get one of the hermit crabs out of the shell. She dropped him into a little pool of water in the hollow of the rock. Betty placed several small shells, one middle-sized, and a large one in the pool and watched as the hermit crab went from one to another trying to fit himself to a shell. The small one was too small, and the large one was too large, but the middle-sized one was just right, and soon Hermit was peacefully ambling at the bottom of the rock pool.

“There are many little people that live in the sea,” said the Princess, “and they all have interesting stories.”

“Do you know what we can do, Myrtle O’Toole?” cried Betty. “We can make an aquarium just like the one Miss Brigham has in school, only instead of goldfish we’ll keep all the different kinds of little sea things. The Princess will tell us

their stories and we can tell the ones at home."

"It is a good idea," said the Princess. "There is a big dish-pan up at the cottage that I can spare you. Run up and get it, Myrtle. It is on the kitchen table."

It did not take Myrtle long to get it. While she was gone, Betty and the Princess hollowed out a place in the sand for it.

"We'll put some of this nice white sand in it first and then fill it with water," said Myrtle, as soon as she came within speaking distance.

After the sand and water came what Betty called "the pretty work." Trips up and down the beach brought to light many pretty stones. Some of them were milky-white and looked like pieces of marble; others were streaked with pink, yellow, and gray. When they were all collected they found that they had a great many more than they needed. It was hard to decide which were the prettiest. At

Betty's suggestion they arranged the left-overs around the edge of the pan.

Seaweed came next, great masses of the floating stuff that made Betty think of the filmy laces they had removed from the old garments at the Castle. Some of it was fastened to rocks while some floated free. Each new bit seemed the most beautiful, so it was hard to decide which to use.

"It's sea-mermaids' hair," laughed Myrtle, as she picked up a big bunch of green. "You know they come up to the surface and sit on rocks to comb their long green hair."

Betty laughed at the fancy and held up a bunch of red.

"It is the first I ever heard of red-headed mermaids. Look at this one. It's pink. That is the funniest yet."

Both girls giggled over the idea of a pink-headed mermaid.

"Let's pretend that our aquarium is a sea palace," proposed Myrtle. "It is an en-

chanted palace where all the gentlemen and ladies have been changed into fish and crabs.”

“That will be fun,” agreed Betty, turning toward the sea.

The rest of the morning was an exciting one, for the enchanted folk were hard to catch. The small crabs with their hard claws put up a gallant fight, as Myrtle’s pinched fingers testified. Betty was afraid to touch them at first, and contented herself with collecting small hermit crabs and things she was very sure would not hurt her. Before it seemed as if an hour had passed, the tinkling of the dinner-bell called them to the house.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

HYDRADA

THE time seemed to fly at the cottage by the sea. Every day disclosed some new wonder for the aquarium or some fascinating bit of knowledge. The dread that had been making Betty's life miserable seemed to be gone. The days were too full for unhappiness.

Both children learned to swim. Myrtle loved the water and was soon paddling around in it quite at home. It took longer for Betty, for she was naturally timid and only sheer heroism impelled her into the sea.

"I am going to put my head in to-day," she announced. "I am going to take hold of my nose and go right under."

“Good,” replied Myrtle. “Do it twice.”

Betty did, and came up shaking the water out of her ears and blowing it out of her nose and mouth.

“Ugh!” she gasped, “I don’t see how any one possibly could like that.”

“Do it again,” ordered Myrtle and Betty heroically obeyed. It was not quite so bad that time, and after doing it several times she did not mind it in the least.

One day they went for a sail in the pretty *Bonnie Maid*. What fun it was skimming over the water!

“It’s just like a lady curtsying to her partner,” said Betty as the boat dropped from the crest of a wave into the trough. Just then an exceptionally big wave reared up in front of them, breaking as it did so and throwing a drenching spray over the boat.

“Oh!” cried Betty.

“Oh, I am dripping wet!” cried Myrtle.

“I have a drop of water in my eye and it feels as if the whole wave went down my neck, but I like it,” gurgled Betty.

“You sound as if you had your mouth full as well,” laughed her friend.

It is not surprising that with so many new things to see and do, old Hydrada, as they still called the grim rock in front of the cottage, was neglected. It is true that it was not forgotten, though, for often at night-time when the little girls were in bed they could hear the waves breaking against the rock, and it was at these times that they used to whisper in soft voices stories about the old monster.

Myrtle said that she was inclined to believe that it was a seven-headed, seven-tailed monster that lived at the base of the rock. Each tail, she said, would hold its victim while the corresponding head would eat it. Finding a large fish skeleton near by lent color to this idea of Myrtle's.

Betty thought Hydrada might be a beau-

tiful lady who, like the sirens of old, lured her victims to their doom. The smaller rocks that lay scattered about the dread spot were enchanted victims of the wicked thing.

Surely the deep pool to the left of the monster rock and the whirlpool to the right of it gave the place a sinister look. The girls avoided it for the most part, finding plenty to keep them busy and amused on the bay side of the cottage.

However, one afternoon it was terribly hot. The mercury in the thermometer went up and up. It seemed as if it could not go so high. The Princess was lying down with a wet cloth on her head and the blinds were closed. The heat had given her a headache.

Marjorie was asleep in the clothes-basket in the kitchen. The clothes-basket was a favorite place with her, and this was not the first time she had dropped off to sleep there.

Betty and Myrtle were on the porch overlooking the water. The tide was nearly out and many of the usually submerged rocks were uncovered. Old Hydrada seemed taller than ever. Never had the tide seemed so low.

"I bet we could get out to old Hydrada if we wanted to," speculated Myrtle. "We could jump from stone to stone. Would you dare?"

Betty hesitated. She knew that she was timid and was trying hard to overcome it. Still to go out to Hydrada, between the witch's caldron and the bottomless pit was terrifying.

"I-er-I guess so," she said rather faintly. "We could start and if we don't like it, we can come back," she added hopefully.

They were half-way to the beach before she noticed the shoes Myrtle was wearing.

"You aren't going to wear those, are you?" she asked pointing to Myrtle's rather shabby footwear.

"They are the very oldest things I have," replied Myrtle, sticking out her foot and looking at it critically. "I can't possibly make that shoe look any worse. I wish I could wear them out so maybe I'd get another pair before school begins. What is the matter with my wearing them?"

"I should think you would be afraid of slipping on the rocks. They are very slippery and some are simply covered with seaweed and barnacles. Where are your sneakers?" asked Betty.

"They are wet," answered her friend. "Don't worry. I'll be all right."

The tide was very low. It seemed strange to see so much of the beach uncovered. It was surprising how easy it really was to get out to the rock. Indeed it was so easy that the girls wondered why they had not tried before.

Only one place made them hesitate. A huge rock had been split in two, leaving a wide chasm between the two halves. At

the bottom was a small trickle of water, but it did not take much imagination to see how swiftly the tide would rush in and fill the opening. At high water, it would be impossible to cross, although it was not a difficult feat to do so at low tide.

Even Myrtle hesitated as she looked across at old Hydrada, which towered above them on the other side, but not for long. She liked to go ahead and finish the things that she started.

“It is a gloomy tower filled with captive princesses. It is our duty to rescue them. Come on, Betty,” and down she slipped into the gully, clinging with sturdy arms to the bunches of seaweed and digging her toes into the nitches in the rock. Arriving safely at the bottom, she turned to help Betty.

The other side of the rock was more gradual, and easy to climb, although it was well over their heads. Just as they reached the top, Myrtle’s foot slipped and

only by clutching Betty's arm did she save herself from rolling to the bottom again, but this was only a minor incident and was readily forgotten in the joy of actually standing on Hydrada.

The side of Hydrada facing the cottage was steep. In it were various cracks and crevices without which ascent would be impossible. Even as it was, the climb was rather a breathless, dizzy one, and Betty gave a little sigh of relief when finally they stood on its summit. They felt as did Balboa when, after a hard and dangerous climb, he actually reached the top of the mountains, and looking over saw the broad expanse of the Pacific Ocean before him.

A little breeze, bespeaking a change of tide, fanned their flushed faces.

"It is actually the first breath of air I have felt to-day," gloated Myrtle. "I just wish the Princess were here. It would drive away that sick headache."

"Look out over the water!" cried Betty

excitedly. "There is the big steamer that we came on. It must be nearly five o'clock. Doesn't it look lovely?"

They watched as it drew nearer and clearer. Before a great many moments the boat reached the wharf and streams of people looking like little black ants hurried ashore.

It was very pleasant on Hydrada. Even the bottomless pit and the Dragon's caldron were much less terrifying when seen at closer range. Indeed they discovered that they had sadly misnamed the bottomless pit, for not very far below the surface of the water they could see sand and rocks with bunches of seaweed attached.

"It isn't even up to my waist," said Betty scornfully, "and we called it bottomless."

"Well, it looked still and deep even when the tide was out," said Myrtle stoutly. "Oh, just look at that lovely bit of seaweed!" she exclaimed. "It's all yellow

and lacy and isn't a bit like any that we have. I must get it for my collection."

As she spoke she began cautiously to crawl down the slanting surface of rock.

"Look out!" warned Betty, but it came too late. The leather shoe had slipped on a bit of seaweed. With a sickening thud Myrtle fell, striking her head against the rock. Limply she slipped down the rock falling with a splash into the water of the bottomless pit. She did not come up.

As she had spoken, Betty stretched out her hand to grasp her friend but it was too sudden a fall. She scrambled down the steep incline, sure-footed in the rubber-soled shoes that she wore. As she reached the edge of the water, she saw Myrtle's white face rising to the surface.

Why didn't she help herself? The water was only waist-deep. Why did she look so dead? Then Betty realized the truth. Myrtle had hit her head. She was unconscious. Perhaps she was dead.

Surely she would be dead if she stayed with her face under water.

Clothes did not matter. She must save Myrtle, so down she splashed. It was a hard tussle to drag her out of the water, for the incline was steep and Myrtle was a dead weight in her arms. The water was deeper than they had imagined it to be. It came nearly to her arm-pits.

She drew Myrtle close to the rock. Then keeping a firm hold on the back of Myrtle's middy, Betty crawled a little way up the surface of the rock. Just a few inches, it was. Badly tired out, she stopped to get her breath. Using all her strength, she pulled Myrtle up to her level. Edging a bit farther she repeated the performance. Little by little, slowly and painfully she dragged her limp bundle up to the first level ledge, which was a few feet above the water. Then she dropped breathlessly down beside her friend.

Fortunately Myrtle was only stunned and had not been in the water long. Soon she opened her blue eyes wearily and Betty hugged her close, crying over her joyfully. She sat up rather dizzily and put her hand to the bump on her head.

“Oh, I am so glad!” cried Betty. “Are you all right now?”

Myrtle shook her head doubtfully. “I can’t see right,” she replied putting her head back into Betty’s lap. “Everything seems to be going round and round in circles, and my head is aching dreadfully.”

“Are you too sick to get home?” asked Betty anxiously.

“I don’t know. I’ll try,” replied Myrtle.

With Betty’s help she slowly rose to her feet and started to climb up the rock, but it was much too much of a task. Dizzy and faint, she crouched down on the rock, pillowing the aching head in her hands. Betty stood beside her, badly frightened,

but staunch. Something must be 'done and she was the only one to do it. But what could she do? It did not seem right to desert the sick friend, but Betty well knew that they ought not to stay on the rock any longer.

The tide had been at lowest ebb when they had left the cottage but it would be turning shortly. The water came in fast, and although it never quite covered Hydrada, it would separate them from the shore. The Princess was still asleep, probably, and they had not told her what they were going to do. Yes, the best way was for Betty to go alone to the cottage and bring back Uncle Ben in the boat.

"Myrtle," she said gently, "would you be dreadfully frightened if I left you for a little while? Some one ought to go and let them know we are here and that you are hurt."

Myrtle shivered. It was terrible to be

left alone on Hydrada. Still, she saw the truth of Betty's words and steeled herself to be as brave as she could.

"I guess that you had better," she replied. "I hate to be left alone, but if you are brave enough to go alone, I must be brave enough to stay."

After she had made her friend as comfortable as possible by making a pillow of seaweed for her and bathing the black and purple lump on her forehead, Betty turned her attention to returning home. It would be a terrifying experience, but it would be for Myrtle and it would please the Princess.

She carefully picked her way up to the summit of Hydrada and was beginning at the steep descent on the other side when a glimpse of the sea beneath made her pause, wide-eyed and frightened. The tide! Why had they remained so long? The water was rushing at a terrifying rate of

speed through the gully that had made them hesitate on the way over. Already it was shoulder-deep and much too wide to cross. Many of the smaller rocks were covered.

Betty had not noticed the change in the weather. She had been worried over different things. With the change of the tide had come a breeze, but it was still very hot. A thunder-cloud for some time had been rolling up in the north. The waves slapped up against the rock. Betty returned to the listless Myrtle. She was sitting up against the part of the rock that towered against the ledge, and was looking decidedly better. Betty had thought of nothing but their predicament.

“Oh, Myrtle!” she sobbed. “The water has come up all around us and we can’t get back to land.”

Myrtle scrambled to her feet steadying herself against the rock wall. She took off the soggy wet shoes to prevent another



“OH, MYRTLE! THE WATER HAS COME UP ALL AROUND US.”

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accident, and in her stocking-feet climbed with Betty to the top of the rock.

“We must scream as loud as we can scream,” said Myrtle, taking in the situation at a single glance. “Perhaps they can hear us at the house.”

They screamed again and again but without result. It was too far away. In the rising storm their voices did not carry to land. Then their spirits failed them and they clung together, crying and shivering.

The wind increased, churning the waves to a creamy foam. The water itself was gloomy green, almost black in spots. Lightning flashed in zigzag lines across the blackness of the clouds. The sky to the north and east grew very dark. The lightning was followed by deep rumblings of thunder.

The rain fell, at first slowly, in great drops. Then it seemed as if the clouds burst over their heads and they were

soaked from head to heel. The waves hit against the rock, throwing the spray up the side of Hydrada.

Strange to say, it was Myrtle who was the more frightened. At every crash she pressed her hands over her ears and screamed. Betty held her close.

"Aren't you afraid of it?" Myrtle asked in some surprise, for it was usually Betty who was more timid.

"I am dreadfully afraid of the rock and being cut off from all the land," replied Betty, "but the storm does not frighten me."

"Why?" asked Myrtle.

"Mother taught me not to be afraid of storms," replied her friend softly. "They used to frighten me badly, but one day Mother took me out on the little piazza of our country house. A storm was coming up and she told me it was beautiful. She said that God sent the thunder-showers when it was dreadfully hot to cool the air

and to give water to the thirsty little blades of grass. After the storm she showed me how beautifully everything was washed. I never was afraid after that."

"But sometimes things are struck," persisted Myrtle, shivering at an especially loud crash. "Mother told me of a man who was killed by lightning or thunder. I don't know which."

"Where was he?" asked Betty.

"In a barn," was the reply.

"Barns get hit oftener than houses, and trees get hit, too, but my mother told me not to be afraid. See, it is getting lighter now. The storm is going over."

Almost as quickly as it had come, the storm cloud rolled away. Betty and Myrtle left the shelter of the ledge and climbed to the top of the rock. They could see the shore plainly since the clouds had rolled away. Just hurrying up to the piazza was the Princess. She looked worried.

The girls knew that she was worried about them. Again they screamed but again the wind seemed to choke back their voices. Fortunately the Princess looked seaward and saw the two little figures on Hydrada.

She waved a reassuring hand at them and hurried around the bend in the path to the old farmhouse where Captain Ben lived. Captain Ben owned the *Bonnie Maid* and several rowboats. He would be able to get them. The girls sighed with relief.

Captain Ben soon appeared. The girls watched him as he hurried along the shore to the place where the *Skipper*, his sturdy dory, was tied. It was not long before his strong arms were sending it toward the Hydrada.

It was hard work to bring the dory between the submerged rocks to the Hydrada's side. On one side, only, was approach possible. Captain Ben, however,

was a clever seaman and carefully and cautiously brought the boat across the bottomless pit. The tide had nearly risen to the ledge so it was an easy thing to step down into the boat.

The Princess was waiting for them on the shore. She looked pale but relieved. Without saying a word she put her arms about the dripping children and held them fast.

That evening, after they had changed into dry clothing, told the Princess of their adventures, and had eaten their supper, the Princess handed Betty a slip of yellow paper with "Western Union" printed on the top of it. Betty read aloud:

"Have located Betty's trunk. Bring her back to open it."

"We start back to-morrow," said the Princess.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE TRUNK

THE next morning there was so much work that had to be done before they could start that Betty had no time to think about the trunk or all that its discovery meant to her. The girls had been called very early, for the boat went shortly after nine. There was much to be done, for there was no Aunt Sally to pack up the lunch and see that all was left in the same beautiful order in which they had found things.

“We will get our dinner in the city,” said the Princess. “It will save time.”

The girls had just a few moments to themselves before slipping into their traveling-dresses. They ran down to

thank Captain Ben for rescuing them from Old Hydrada. They promised to write a letter to him, telling him all about the things that happened on the way home.

“We are going to tell all the other girls the stories that you told us,” said Myrtle.

“We will write and tell you what they say,” promised Betty.

From there they went down to the little bay, as they wanted to visit all their favorite nooks for one last time. There was the place where the buried treasure, a good heap of yellow and white quartz stones, lay.

“I wonder if any one will ever discover them,” said Betty. “Wouldn’t it be a good joke if some one did?”

Myrtle giggled.

“The note which we wrote and put in the bottle would let them know that it was real treasure, gold and diamonds, that they had discovered, and signing it in red ink with skull and crossbones would let them know

it was the 'deed of murdering pirates," she answered.

"Speaking about murderers, we must set free our captured knights and ladies in the aquarium or we shall be honest-to-goodness ones," put in Betty, hastily.

It was quite an exciting chase, for the crabs and minnows did not know how greatly they were being benefited by the change. The minnows darted this way and that. The crabs put up a gallant fight, defending themselves as best they could with their sharp little claws.

"Any one would think we were trying to do something awful to them," said Betty, running an exploring forefinger over her badly nipped thumb. "This old villain of a Sid Darnard is the hardest to catch. I have been chasing him for the last five minutes."

Finally, however, the last crab was caught and none too soon for just as they watched him scuttle away under the rocks,

the bell rang summoning them to the house to dress for the trip. It was sad to go away. Even old Hydrada looked more friendly this morning.

“He really did protect us,” said Myrtle thoughtfully. “If he had not been so tall and had such nice ledges——”

“Don’t let’s think of it,” begged Betty shivering. “All I can see is your white face under the water and that gulf of green water between us and the shore. It was awful, Princess.”

“I know it must have seemed that way,” replied the Princess, “but it is all over now, and think what a wonderful adventure it will be to tell the other girls and boys.”

The trip on the boat was delightful and the girls enjoyed every moment of it, but the city was stifling. The train went soon after the boat came in, so there was time for only the hastiest of lunches. The heat was so intense that it made every one feel lifeless. It was a relief to get on the train.

Marjorie promptly went to sleep and Myrtle shortly afterward followed her example.

Betty couldn't sleep. She sat with a puckered-up forehead gazing out at the flyaway landscape. Houses, trees, ponds, and fields slipped by, and although she seemed to be looking at them very intently, not a single thing did she really see. Her thoughts were on the Orphan Asylum of her dream, and there was dread in her heart.

"What are you thinking of, Betty-girl?" asked the Princess, gently taking the little girl's hand in her own. Betty turned worried eyes toward her.

"It's about the trunk, Princess," she replied. "I am so afraid that there won't be any relatives, or if there are, they won't want me that I don't know what to do. Grandma always said that I should have to go where there were other children that

no one wanted, and I can't bear the thought of it."

Tears were trickling down the little girl's face, making black streaks with the car soot that was already there. The Princess put a comforting arm about her and drew the golden head down until it rested on her shoulder, but she hesitated a moment before she spoke.

She longed to tell the little girl that there was no cause for worry, that she and the King were all ready to keep her forever if there were no people of her own, but it was not fair to raise the child's hopes, for after all there might be other people, relatives who might want the little girl and who had the first claim. She only drew the child closer.

"I have been so happy with you," went on Betty. "Ever since I was sick, it has been like living in a beautiful dream. It has been too good to last."

“Things will work out, Betty,” replied the Princess softly. “I am sure you need not worry. We do not know what will happen, but I can promise you that there is nothing to dread. Now put your head on my shoulder and forget all the things that worry and perplex you. Think of how much you will have to tell the girls at home.”

Whether the movement of the train or the Princess’s soothing words comforted her, Betty did not know. She grew drowsier and drowsier and then she fell sound asleep, and was not awakened until the train had nearly reached the station at home.

The King was waiting for them at the station. After a hug and a kiss all around, he bundled them into the waiting automobile and they were started for the Brown Castle.

Now that they were so nearly home, it seemed as if they could hardly wait.

“How could we ever have gone away?” said Betty as they were going around the last corner.

Myrtle was looking at the King. “Your eyes are twinkling, and they look shiny. Have you got a secret?” she asked.

“Look and see,” said the King, pointing towards the house.

What a pleasant surprise! All the dingy brown paint had been scraped and a new coat replaced it. Of course the new color was brown, also, for otherwise the Castle would have to lose its name. But the house was not the biggest attraction, for there on the lawn were all the friends of the Brown Castle.

Myrtle could hardly wait until the auto stopped in front of the gate. Almost before it had done so, she was out tearing across the lawn into the arms of her mother who stood with a twin on either side of her. Such a kissing and hugging!

Luckily Dick had been able to secure a substitute and was on hand to meet his little sister. It seemed as if things would never settle down. Finally the King suggested that the travelers needed rest, so the guests dispersed to come back again next day. Now the time had come to open the trunk that meant so much to Betty.

The outside was very familiar, for Betty remembered the queer lock distinctly. It was not a wonderful trunk in appearance, for it was old and shabby.

The lock presented difficulties. In it a spider had built his web, and there was no key. None had been found among Betty's grandmother's things. It seemed a sacrilege to break the lock, but what was to be done?

Aunt Sally who was an interested spectator of all that was being done solved the question. When the discoveries were going on she had left the room, only to ap-

pear shortly with a big box of keys of assorted sizes and shapes.

“Dese keys were some I found up in de garret when I was cleanin’,” she said importantly. “Dere is about a hundred, an’ I miss my guess if one of ’em don’t fit dis lock.”

The King selected one and tried to fit it to the lock, but it was too big, another and yet another was tried. All failed.

“Looks as if we should have to try every one,” said the King.

Betty picked up an odd-looking key, tied on a bit of faded blue ribbon. It seemed of curious pattern and shape. On one side were initials engraved upon an inlaid piece of silver in the shape of a diamond. The initials were R.C. She handed it to the King.

“R.C.,” he exclaimed. “Those were my wife’s initials, and this key fitted her little wedding trunk. It was about the

same size as this. Perhaps it will fit."

"Let me try it," said Betty. "I feel sure it will fit, and I would like to open it." As she spoke, she inserted the key in the hole. It fitted as if it were made for it. It took nearly all Betty's strength to turn it over, but a dull click rewarded her attempts. The trunk was unlocked. No longer did lock and key bar her from knowing her fate. Her hands trembled as she lifted the lid. The Princess, Aunt Sally, and the King drew closer.

There was not much to see at first. A large piece of newspaper covered the entire contents of the trunk. This upon being removed disclosed a large black shawl. It was of Spanish lace and very beautiful. Under the shawl was the dress that Betty remembered so well. Her mother put it in soon after they came to the city. It was of white lawn, sprinkled with yellow rosebuds. She gathered it up in her arms in delight.

Under it was a letter addressed to Betty and bearing the inscription: "Not to be opened unless I am called away." It seemed like a message from the dead, and Betty wept. The Princess called her attention back to the trunk. For the most part the trunk was filled with clothing. However, at the very bottom was a square bundle wrapped securely and fastened with seals. On it also was written, "For Betty Anne after I am gone."

" 'Betty Anne,' " said the Princess reflectively, "you never told me your name was Elizabeth Anne."

"Grandma never liked the name, Anne," replied Betty, "but Mother loved it and she always used to call me Betty Anne."

The seals were soon broken and the bundle unwrapped. Within the wrapping was a mahogany box. It was locked, but the key was lying flatwise on top.

At the sight of the box the King started violently, and put his hand to his head, but

no one noticed him. Their eyes were intent upon the box in front of them. The lock was not hard to turn, yet Betty hesitated a moment. All her hopes and fears were in this box lying upon her lap. Whatever was there, it meant a change. Perhaps it would mean a loving relative who would take care of her and love her for her mother's or her father's sake, or it might be a hateful case of relatives who did not want her but who felt that they must take her.

Then she lifted the lid of the box. There were a few letters tied up with ribbon that she laid in the Princess's lap. That was all, except something wrapped in a delicate handkerchief. Betty's hands trembled as she opened it. Like a whisper of a memory, so faint that she could hardly be sure, she recalled her Mother having shown her a piece of lace similar to the deep edge about the handkerchief, and

saying that it was all hand-done by her grandmother long ago.

Every one leaned forward to see what the handkerchief contained. In the King's face burned a light so intense as to be almost painful. His hands gripped the arms of the chair and his face was strained.

The contents of the packet were amazing. The faculties of every one seemed dazed. Then the Princess swept Betty into her arms and held her as though she never intended to let her go. The King coughed and wiped suspicious drops of moisture from his eyes. Aunt Sally openly burst into tears.

Yet the things wrapped up in the handkerchief were not so startling in themselves—a worn wedding ring, a small doll with a brightly painted china head, and a broken bit of jewelry. The doll looked very old. Its dress was faded and worn, yet held just a trace of its original pink.

The bit of jewelry seemed to be a pendant. It was broken. It looked as though it might have been broken from a chain. In the shape of a butterfly, its wings were made of small slivers of red stones.

Betty looked at it in amazement. Somewhere she had seen something very familiar. Suddenly a light broke upon her.

"The Lost Princess," she whispered in the ear of her beloved Princess. "The other part of the garnet necklace! What does it mean?"

The Princess pushed away the golden curls from Betty's forehead and looked gravely into the child's eyes. It was a beautifully tender look. The King rose from his seat and put his arms around both Betty and the Princess. His face looked different, Betty noticed. It was a beautiful look, which made him seem younger. It was he who answered.

"It means that my quest is ended," he said softly. "From the day that I drove

my girl away from me in anger I have grieved. Since I got her last letter I have worried over the fate of my little grandchild, but now the search is over. Betty, Betty Anne, come to your grandfather."

It was a very happy time. A live fairy tale come true. Such lovely things couldn't really happen outside the covers of a book. Betty just simply could not believe it. She went about the house murmuring, "I am the Lost Princess Anne. I belong here. The King is my grandfather and the Princess is my cousin. My wish has come true. I am going to live here forever and ever and ever."

Then there was Mother's letter to read. It told the whole story of the separation, the mother-love, and it told Betty just what to do in case of need. Enclosed was a note addressed to the King. He went off all by himself to read it. No one saw him again until supper time. When he came back he looked sad and yet happy, too,

as Betty expressed it later to the Princess.

Of course it was too wonderful to be kept to one's self even for one night. Before eight o'clock the whole neighborhood had heard that the little Lost Anne was none other than Betty herself, and the whole neighborhood was rejoicing over her good fortune.

Just before bedtime the Princess discovered her sitting at the window in her own little forget-me-not room. Betty jumped up to greet her. After leading her to the chair by the window she climbed into her lap.

"Do you know, I have been thinking and thinking," she began. "My Mother used to sit at this window and in this very chair, too. She used to sleep in this bed and write at this cunning little desk. I have been sitting here and sleeping and writing here for weeks, and I never knew. Do you know, I think there was something very strange about my dream. I dreamed

that my mother and I were standing on the hill and that you came up to us. Mother put my hand in yours and we came down together. Perhaps I really did see her, and she was trying to tell me that I was going to belong to you."

They sat together as the twilight deepened. A single star shone out above a little crescent moon. Betty looked up at it and smiled.

"I have been wishing and wishing on that star," she said reflectively, "but I am not wishing any more. I don't need to, for my wish has come true, and I am the happiest girl in the world."

THE END

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